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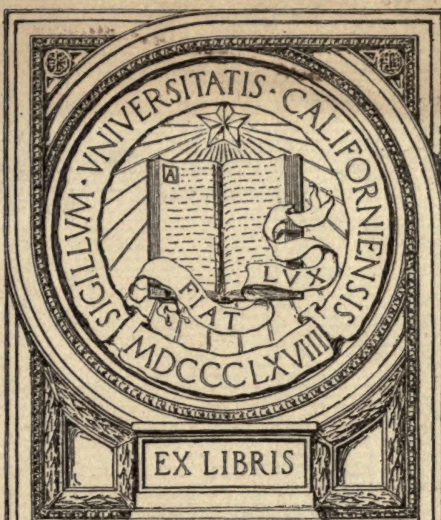
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A HANDBOOK  
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BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES.

A HANDBOOK

BIBLICAL LITERATURE

A HANDBOOK  
OF  
BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES;

OR,

*REASONABLE SOLUTIONS OF PERPLEXING  
THINGS IN SACRED SCRIPTURE.*

EDITED BY

REV. ROBERT TUCK, B.A. (LOND.),

AUTHOR OF

'THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY,' 'FIRST THREE KINGS OF ISRAEL,'  
'AGE OF THE GREAT PATRIARCHS.'

'... In which are some things hard to be understood,'

ST. PETER,

...

NEW YORK:

THOMAS WHITTAKER,

2 AND 3, BIBLE HOUSE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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IT has been the duty and privilege of the Editor of this 'Handbook' for the last twenty years to study closely those portions of Holy Scripture which are likely to be used as lessons, sermon-subjects, or illustrations, by Sunday-school teachers and ministers. In the course of study note has been taken of all passages which seemed to present special difficulties. These have been treated, in various ways, in Sunday-school and other magazines, and in books; but it has been thought advisable to deal with these difficulties in a more systematic manner, and to put at the command of the intelligent reader—and especially of the reader who has not ready access to expensive Biblical works—a suggestive and reasonable explanation of every perplexity, or at least of every class of perplexity.

In selecting the topics for treatment, it has been borne in mind that all readers of the Sacred Word do not find difficulties in the same things. Effort has been made to adapt the selection of topics to all kinds of open and inquiring minds; but it has always been assumed that the inquirer is sincere and reverent, anxious to find a satisfactory explanation, and not sceptically pleased by making difficulties bigger than they are, and by refusing to recognise the reasonableness of solutions that are offered.

The treatment of subjects is in no case elaborate or complete. A suggestive style has been kept throughout. Explanations are offered for careful consideration: they are intended to start thought, and not to satisfy it. The purpose of the work will be fully accomplished if the reader finds a more acceptable solution of any difficulty than it provides. The work will be misused if it is made the basis of heated and sectarian controversy. It has been prepared for the quiet and thoughtful student, and makes no provision of weapons for the polemic.

Nothing is suggested that is unfamiliar to advanced students of God's Word. But there has been much gain by the Bible Revision, and Bible criticism, of recent years, which ought to become the common knowledge of the people. This 'Handbook' may aid in making the advanced knowledge of the college the possession even of the Sunday-school class. And the Sacred Book is best honoured by the fullest and best knowledge of its contents, and of its original associations.

Footnotes and references to learned authors have been avoided. The books referred to, in the paragraphs, are for the most part such as may be found in every good library; and readers who desire to study any subject further will easily discover the works that will give them efficient help.

Quotations are made from other authors with a threefold object in view: (1) To support the explanation that is suggested by due authorities. (2) To suggest other explanations than that which seems most acceptable to the writer of the paragraph. And (3) to relieve the sense of freshness and strangeness which may be caused by some of the solutions that are offered. There are many cases in which the explanation will occasion surprise, and even resistance. In such cases the support of some honoured and trusted name will ensure that the suggestions made are, at least, calmly and candidly considered.

May our readers find, in the study of this 'Handbook,' what we have found in the preparation of it, an ever-enlarging knowledge of, and an ever-deepening reverence for, that Word which, 'inspired of God, is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.'

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## INTRODUCTION.



### I.

THE Roman Emperor, Diocletian, found it impossible to uproot Christianity unless he could destroy the Christian books. His experience has been repeated in the succeeding generations, and whenever unusual energy has been shown in attacks upon the Christian system, the stress of battle has gathered round the great Christian Book.

This age is regarded as, in a special sense, a sceptical age ; but its peculiarity seems rather to be that the distinction between those who attack, and those who defend, the Christian Faith is confused, and Christianity is now too often wounded in the house of its friends. The spirit of scepticism is spread far more widely, and its evil influence is more generally felt, than many of us have yet recognized. Questioning, not in a simple and intelligent spirit of inquiry, but in a self-confident spirit of doubting, is now too often treated as a sign of mental vigour ; and instead of the open attacks on God's Word, on the possibility of a book-revelation, and on the nature and claims of inspiration, such as our fathers had to meet, the too-prevailing fashion of our times is, by assumptions of superior critical, scientific, and historical knowledge, and by a scarcely veiled satire, to show up the so-called untruthfulness and untrustworthiness of much that is contained in God's Word. The pitched battle of former times is exchanged for a very trying guerilla warfare. We have not so much to defend the Bible as a whole as to wrestle for possession of the details of every book, and well-nigh every chapter.

The air is full of objections to the contents of our Bible, exaggerations of the difficulties which modern readers find in it, and misrepresentations of its meanings and teachings. These things are freely heard in homes and society, in workshop, warehouse, and mill, as well as in workmen's clubs and debating societies. They are circulated in the literature provided for the working classes and the young, as well as for those who lay claim to cultured intelligence.

Precisely what is needed, therefore, in our times is a fair, clear, and reasonable reply to the various objections made against the teachings of the Bible, and a satisfactory explanation of those difficulties which a thoughtful reader finds in it.

For the great majority of Bible-students such calm and reasonable explanations will prove of more practical value than any kind of dogmatic assertions or arguments that defend Holy Scripture for the sake of particular creeds, and lead into the heated spheres of religious controversy. The removal of felt difficulties by the application of modern knowledge of Eastern customs and sentiments, by using wisely the results of recent travels and researches in Bible lands, by treating the Bible as a book composed under human conditions, though with an all-controlling Divine inspiration, and by bringing good common-sense and 'sweet reasonableness' to bear upon the actions of men who were placed in difficult circumstances, and lived in ancient times, will materially aid in restoring and establishing the general confidence in the Bible, as indeed the Word of the living God, the Revelation of His will to men, the treasure-trust of every age, and the all-sufficing rule of faith and of conduct, of religion and of morals, for all humanity.

The *Handbook of Biblical Difficulties* is not intended to be an elaborate and abstruse treatise, suited only for the learned few. It is designed to meet the needs of the ever-enlarging classes that are benefiting by the modern improved methods of education, and are culturing an inquiring disposition, which would know the 'why' and 'wherefore' of everything, even of things revealed.

Throughout the work hearty loyalty to the Inspiration of the Scriptures will be maintained, and all subjects introduced for consideration will be treated with becoming reverence, and with a con-

stant endeavour to find and set forth those higher moral and spiritual teachings that may be in them. But it will be always kept in view that, as God was pleased to use human minds for the presentation of His truth and will, so He is now pleased to use human minds for the understanding and unfolding of His will. Knowledge of life, of men's motives, of politics—local and national, of history, of human character, and of Bible lands and times, will often suggest simple and probable explanations that readily remove the difficulties of which the foes of God's Word are disposed to make so much.

Anything like the *manufacture* of difficulties is carefully avoided ; and only such are treated as are suggested in modern sceptical literature, or naturally suggest themselves to thoughtful readers.

Some difficulties must of necessity be insoluble under our present conditions of knowledge and of mental faculty ; but some of these concern subjects which Biblical criticism and research will, *by-and-by*, satisfactorily explain ; and others are matters of purely human speculation, which we have forcibly associated with God's Word, but are not, properly speaking, matters of present Divine Revelation ; and these no ingenuity of man can successfully deal with. However valuable and interesting men's thoughts on such matters may be, they are separate and distinct from God's Revealed Word, which must never be made responsible for men's arguments or theories on purely speculative subjects.

Sometimes, in this work, a solution is suggested which only fairly well meets the difficulty with which it deals ; but in such cases it should be borne in mind that no assertion is made concerning the all-sufficiency of such solutions. There are instances in which all that can possibly be done is the lightening of the pressure of a difficulty by showing that a reasonable explanation *can* be offered.

The divisions of the topics of necessity involves some measure of repetition, as the same general principles must be applied to different cases. But this will not be found a disadvantage in a book which, in part, takes a cyclopædic form.

Throughout the work a calm and dispassionate tone is preserved. The object aimed at is instruction and suggestion, the direction of a thoughtful and prayerful consideration to some of the hindrances

that stand in the way of a full confidence in, and free practical use of, God's Holy Word, that Word which 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'

## II.

### THE VIEW OF THE INSPIRATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE, ON WHICH THE FOLLOWING EXPLANATION OF DIFFICULTIES ARE BASED.

It is not possible within the limits of an introductory chapter to attempt an essay or treatise on the general subject of Inspiration. It will suffice for our purpose to record, as simply as possible, the points of interest which have come plainly to view out of the varied controversies of recent years, and to fix attention on such as have gained, or are gaining, general acceptance.

The older view, more or less correctly known as the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration, is thus stated by Dr. Knapp :—'Inspiration is an extraordinary Divine agency upon teachers while giving instruction, whether oral or written, by which they were taught what and how they should write or speak.' Those who thus defined inspiration fully recognised that God operated on the minds of men in a variety of different ways ; sometimes by audible words, sometimes by direct inward suggestions, sometimes by the Urim and Thummim, and sometimes by dreams and visions. God moved and guided His servants to write things which they could not know by natural means, or led them to write the history of events, which were wholly or partly known to them by tradition, or by the testimony of their contemporaries, or by their own observation or experience. But the variety in the form and manner of the Divine influence detracted nothing from its certainty. The writers were preserved from error, and influenced to write just so much, and in such a manner, as God saw to be best.

Round this mode of representing the fact and truth of the Divine Inspiration the controversies of recent generations have been waged, with the result that now five distinct theories are presented, and

belief in any one of these five is regarded as compatible with membership in the Orthodox Christian Church. *Archdeacon Farrar* gives these theories in brief and sharply-defined terms.

1. The *organic*, mechanical, or dictation theory. It holds that every sentence, every word, nay, even every syllable, letter, and vowel-point of Scripture had been divinely and supernaturally imparted; that the authors of the various books, known and unknown, had no share in their composition; they were but the amanuenses and instruments, 'not only the penmen, but the pens,' of the Holy Spirit—being not even the active recipients, but the mere passive vehicles of that which, through them, but with no co-operation of their own, was imparted to mankind. According to this theory, the Bible is in every text absolutely supernatural, transcendently Divine.

2. The *dynamic* or power theory. It holds that Holy Scripture was not 'dictated by,' but 'committed to writing under the guidance of,' the Holy Spirit. While recognising the Divine energy, it does not annihilate the human co-operation. The truths are inspired by the Holy Spirit, the words and phrases are the result of the writer's own individuality; the material is of God, the form is of man. According to this theory, the Bible is throughout human, as well as throughout Divine.

3. The theory of *Illumination*, understanding that word to suggest various *degrees* of inspiration. Some distinguish between the grace of superintendency, the grace of elevation, the grace of direction, and the grace of suggestion. According to this theory, the Bible is Divine, but in different degrees.

4. The theory of *essential*, as distinguished from plenary inspiration. It holds that the Bible *contains* the word of God, that it is the record of a Divine revelation, and the authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit; but it confines this inspiration to matters of doctrine, morality, and faith. The accidental allusions of Scripture, and its passing phrases, need not be treated as inspired. According to this theory, the Bible is only Divine in matters of faith.

5. The theory of *ordinary* inspiration. It holds that the action of the Holy Spirit, as exercised in the inspiration of Scripture, is not *generically* distinct from the ordinary influence of that Holy Spirit

upon the heart and intellect of all Christian men, which all admit to be *analogous* to it. Each book and passage of Scripture must be tested by its inherent consistency with that which we learn of God's will from His revelation of Himself, above all in the life of Christ. According to this theory the Bible is inspired, but not always miraculous.

(For fuller explanations of these theories, see articles in 'Bible Educator,' vol. i., pp. 205, 206.)

From this statement of modern opinions it will be seen within what wide limits orthodox thought may now range. In an eclectic spirit the following work is based upon the measure of truth there seems to be in *all* these theories, while jealously preserving the central truth, that a special Divine fitness was given to the various writers, and a special Divine guidance directed the gathering together, and preserving, of these sacred books.

In relation to the particular study of 'Biblical Difficulties,' certain features of the Book have been set in prominence. Brief notice may be taken of the following :—

1. The individuality of the agents employed is plainly impressed on their several works. The style of this man and that is evidently retained in their compositions ; and when this fact is thought out, it comes to view that the measure of knowledge of each writer, his very modes of thinking, and the personal meaning he attaches to particular words, are kept and used. A writer never loses his individuality by becoming an inspired writer ; and what he writes must, in part at least, be judged by the application of ordinary literary rules and standards. This point is kept in view, and many difficulties connected with composition and language find their solution in the light of it.

'The employment of the human mind as the agent, and of human language and writing as the instruments, necessarily involves a measure of fallibility in the record of the revelation. It ought indeed, to be distinctly borne in mind that there is no necessary, or even reasonable, connection between a man's being the subject of a special Divine communication and his subsequent universal infallibility ; nor can we have the assurance of such infallibility unless we

could insure, not only the presence of the Divine Spirit in the man, but also the absence of everything else.'

2. Seeing that man is endowed with faculties by Nature, which enable him to search out and know everything connected with Nature necessary for his individual welfare, and for the welfare of the race; and seeing that such 'searching out' is a necessary condition of his intellectual and social development, it is unreasonable for him to expect, and it would be injurious for him to receive, an infallible revelation on matters of science, observation, philosophy, or history. And the Bible never assumes that it bears any such character. Dr. Angus says: 'We must not expect to learn anything from Scripture, except what it is, in a religious point of view, important for us to know. Some seek the "dead among the living" (as Lord Bacon phrased it), and look into the Bible for natural philosophy and human science.'

But it follows from this that the ancient books of our Scripture contain the ethical, scientific, social, and governmental notions of the ages in which they were severally written; and that very much recorded in the Bible must be seen in the light of ancient sentiments and early limitations of knowledge. By the application of this principle many Bible difficulties find satisfactory solution.

3. In the sphere of morals man is placed under two serious disabilities. By his very constitution he is made dependent on God for the distinctions between right and wrong; and by his own attempt at self-rule, and consequent experience of evil and its consequences, he has blinded himself so that he confuses the distinctions which God sets before him. In the sphere, therefore, of morals and religion, where man is especially weak, there is pressing need for an infallible Divine revelation, which can guide with authority man's conduct and opinion.

It is reasonable, therefore, to expect moral and religious counsels and truths at the heart of historical events, and of incidents associated with individuals; and a surface Bible difficulty is often removed when we can see the higher moral and spiritual purpose for which the events are recorded.

4. Remarks will be found elsewhere on the *progressive* character of

the Divine Revelation, and on the distinction between the truth and the setting that truth may need for its adaptation to a particular people, at a particular time.

5. It is only necessary further to call to mind that the Bible cannot fail to retain the impressions made by the *editing* of its various contents, and its *translation* from one language into another. Words in different languages are not always precise equivalents, and effective relief of difficulties in Bible expressions is often gained by consulting the translation into another tongue.

Without more closely defining a theory of inspiration, in view of the treatment pursued in this 'Handbook of Biblical Difficulties,' it may be said that a *human* element is recognised in the Bible, as we have it ; that this human element is the main cause of the perplexities which earnest and devout persons find in studying it ; that these human errors may be discovered and corrected by human skill, and with the aid of human knowledge ; that the removal of difficulties will only make the pure revealed will of God shine out with fuller, clearer rays ; and that a faithful effort to correct the human mistakes in God's Word, and to relieve it of burdensome perplexities, *can* be made consistently with a most reverent love for it as the one, only, and all-sufficient revelation of God's will, of God, of man, of salvation, of faith, and of duty, for the entire human race.

*A. J. Scott* suggestively writes : ' There is, then, anterior to Scripture, a manifold revelation of God. Of this, Scripture is a history and an exposition. We have seen how it recounts and expands the Divine manifestations in creation, in providence, in miracles, in human conscience, in inspired thoughts, words, and works. We lose the lesson of great part of the Bible if we regard it merely as an inspired and authoritative announcement *to us now* ; not historically, as recording, for our example, the condition of human spirits under the power of Divine inspiration of old.'

And *Isaac Taylor* has the following fine passage on the Bible, which is well worthy of being commended to the attention of our readers :—' As a human work, as a collection of ancient treatises, letters, and histories, composed by almost as many authors as there are separate pieces, it is plainly liable to all the ordinary conditions

of other ancient literature ; and not merely to the critical, but to the logical conditions that belong to the products of the human mind ; and, of course, when categorically interrogated for its evidence in relation to certain abstract positions, derived, not from itself, but from a variable theological science, will yield not a few apparent contrarieties. This would be the case even were the Bible the work of a single author. But the Bible claims no respect at all as an authority in religion, unless it be received as, in the fullest sense, a Divine work. As such it must have its peculiar conditions, and the most important of these spring from the fact that the Scriptures contain true information, explicit or implied, concerning more systems than one, and more orders of causation than one. . . . The harmony of the various portions will never come within the range of the methods of human science ; for human science is drawn from one system only, and is vague and imperfect, even in relation to that one system.'

An unconscious testimony to the uniqueness—may we not say to the Divine inspiration—of the Bible is recorded by *Reville*, an advocate of French Rationalism, in an essay in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes.' 'One day the question was started in an assembly, What book a man condemned to a life-long imprisonment, and to whom but one would be allowed, had better choose to take into the cell with him? The company consisted of Catholics, Protestants, philosophers, and even Materialists, but all agreed that his choice would fall only on the Bible.' Surely a distinguished tribute to the Bible—a tribute not merely to its intellectual excellence, but also to its *religious importance*.



# HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES.

## SECTION I.

### DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO MORAL SENTIMENTS.

#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE so-called 'moral difficulties' of the Old Testament Scriptures are, to a very large extent, created by those who cannot recognise that Divine revelation has been given to men in stages, with an evident progression towards completeness, and in each stage with precise adaptation to the associations and the capabilities of the age. The truth of the 'accommodation' of Divine revelation to the times in which it is given, and to the circumstances and associations and mental capacities of the people to whom it is addressed, Bible readers have gravely hesitated to receive. It is now, however, becoming a more familiar truth, and it is found to be practically efficient for the removal of some of the most perplexing Old Testament difficulties.

One of the most cautious and judicious writers of the modern school of religious thought is the late Frederic Myers, M.A., of Keswick. He says: 'Not only is there progression in the revelation of the Bible, but also accommodation. By accommodation is meant not merely the use of sensible images and purely human expressions in the conveyance of spiritual ideas, or of types and symbols, and parables and allegories, in the exhibition or explanation of invisible realities; but more than this, namely, the temporary permission and sanction of existing modes of thought and feeling with regard to religious truth and duty, which were not merely inadequate but partially untrue, and which it was intended subsequently to supersede by fuller revelations. The earlier anthropomorphic representations of Deity are of this kind; and, indeed, throughout the whole law of Moses, God is spoken of in terms which require a translation into other language with which the later revelations have furnished us

before we can heartily accept them as Divine. It is only, indeed, on this principle of accommodation that we can learn willingly to associate some portion of the Hebrew Scriptures with the revelations of the Gospel of Christ.

‘And when we turn from the region of Truth to that of Morality, we find this assumption still more necessary. We find the polygamy of the Patriarchs and of David and of Solomon, and the warrior spirit of the Judges, and many acts of treachery and of cruelty, from Jael to Jehu, sanctioned rather than rebuked by prophetic communications.

‘For of all the difficulties which present themselves in our reading the Hebrew Scriptures, by far the most urgent is the contradiction which we feel between much of the spirit which was there sanctioned and approved, and that which is the first commandment of the New. This has been so frequently and so forcibly felt by many in all ages—by the most pious, as well as by the less so—that it has been a constant subject of difficulty and discussion. In the earliest ages of the Church this was so much the case that the Old Testament was supposed by many to have had an origin the most opposed to Divine. . . . So long as the principle of progression and accommodation in God’s revelations is not recognised but rejected, there will always seem to some a certain measure of reasonableness and healthy moral instinct in the distaste which is felt towards much of the spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures. In such case no explanations or expositions will fail to remove the first impressions conveyed by the fact of the slaughter of the Canaanites being said to be in its details the command of the Most High; nor will enable us to reconcile with the later revelations of Deity the other suggestions and approvals which we find ascribed to God in the histories of several of the Judges; or the commands which were given, and the spirit which was exhibited, by several of the most conspicuous of the prophets. The execrations of several of the Psalms ever have appeared, and ever will appear, incongruous with that peculiar spirit which the Christian is to be of, while many of the habits and practices and views of the most approved of old time will obviously not bear to be transferred to our conception of any New Testament saint. So long as we are not permitted to believe that God gave precepts of Duty and revelations of Truth to his people of old only as they could bear them, and tolerated the co-existence and commingling of much darkness of the natural man with the special illuminations of His Spirit, so long we cannot but contrast, and contrasting pronounce in many parts as contradictory, the spirit of

the kingdom which was of this world and the spirit of that kingdom which was not of this world—the spirit of a Joshua, a Samson, or an Elisha with the spirit of a Peter, a John, or a Paul.’

The moral difficulties dealt with in this section concern either (1) the imperfect sentiments of a particular age; or (2) questions of casuistry, or the exceptions which must be made to moral rule under pressing exigencies; or (3) the infirmities and errors of those who may, on the whole, be called good; or (4) the difficulties created by anthropomorphic and anthropopathic representations of God.

It is not usually found an easy thing to distinguish carefully between the great foundation moral laws which God has prescribed for man as man, and for man in his more personal and family relations, and those *bye-laws* which man has himself arranged for the ordering of society and the relations of the several nations, and which may be, more or less, excellent adaptations of the Divine laws, but must be in precise adjustment to the sentiments and circumstances of each particular age and people. God may approve of man’s bye-laws for the age and condition, but we must not assume more than a temporary and conditional approbation. Many of the permitted things of the Old Testament are allowed because of their agreement with man’s accepted bye-laws, and not because they are absolutely right.

The questions of casuistry are so many and so subtle as to have become the basis of a science. Under some circumstances all moralists admit that the laws of truthfulness may be relaxed; the prisoner may deceive to get out of his dungeon; the general may deceive to gain an advantage in war. So far as universal sentiment allows a departure from moral rules for the preservation of life and honour, this excuse may be applied to the actions of the men and women of the Old Testament.

It is not always sufficiently recognised that, in using men as the agents for carrying out His purposes, God employs *moral beings*, who put *character* into the method of their obedience. God orders the thing, but man finds the particular way of doing it. And so God may approve and reward the *thing done*, while at the same time He may disapprove the way in which it was done, and even punish the agent for the sin in his method of doing it. An illustration of this may be found in the story of the violent Jehu.

Historical truthfulness, it should be observed, does not involve unlimited and uncritical commendation. An older notion was, that everything narrated in Holy Scripture of good men must somehow be good, and painful efforts were made to find excuses for what were

manifestly faults, failings, and sins, and should be simply called by their right names. The direct relation of Scripture to the teaching of *morals* comes out in nothing so impressively as in the fact that the character and conduct of the persons introduced are fully and honestly detailed. In the ordinary biographies of gifted and good people we always have one-sided pictures. The human faults are hidden or slurred over, and palliated. The effort of many biographers is to present a fancy picture of a life on which lies no stain; and so, in the ordinary biography, there may be much intellectual teaching, and much inspiration to seeking after high and noble attainments, but there is seldom direct moral teaching. Exactly the opposite is true of the Scriptures. Their mission is moral; so they give us the men as they really were, and expect us to call their moral failings by their right names, and to learn from their sins as well as from their virtues.

Only one point more need be noticed. The severities of Eastern and ancient methods in dealing with individuals under kingly tyrannies, and with cities and armies in war-times, create constant surprise and offence. But two things should be kept in mind: (1) the small value that has always been put on *life* in Eastern countries; and (2) that the sentiment of humanity in relation to war is almost entirely a product of our highly civilized and peace-loving age. Even in the times of our grandfathers, horrible deeds were done in India and Spain, at the sack of conquered cities, against which the sentiment of their age did not greatly revolt, and which even now seem to us but the weak side of heroic deeds. In view of such things it should not be difficult for us rightly to regard the harrowing details of ancient warfare.

Writing of Jael's dreadful and treacherous deed, *Dr. Arnold*, of Rugby, says: 'The spirit of the commendation of Jael is that God allows largely for ignorance where He finds sincerity; that they who serve Him honestly up to the measure of their knowledge are, according to the general course of His providence, encouraged and blessed; that they whose eyes and heart are still fixed on duty and not on self are plainly that smoking flax which He will not quench, but cherish rather until it be blown into a flame. . . . Right and good it is that we should condemn the acts of many of those commended in the Old Testament, for we have seen what prophets and righteous men for many an age were not permitted to see; but no less right and needful it is that we should imitate their fearless zeal, without which we, in our knowledge, are without excuse; with which they, by their unavoidable ignorance, were even in their evil deeds blessed.'

## DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO MORAL SENTIMENTS.

---

### God represented as employing a Lying Spirit.

I KINGS xxii. 22, 23 : 'And he said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt entice him, and shalt prevail also ; go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets ; and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Difficulty.**—*How can we conceive of God as using untruthful and evil agencies for carrying out of His purposes ?*

**Explanation.**—We should distinctly see that this is part of a vision granted to Micaiah, and is in no sense intended to be a *description* of what had actually taken place in the upper world. Apologues, fables, parables, and visions are misused when they are treated as literally descriptive. It is characteristic of the Eastern mind that nothing can be stated in plain, prosaic, logical terms. The Eastern is always carried away with the desire to 'make a picture of it,' but no importance attaches to the figures and situations of the picture, beyond the power they may have in carrying to other minds the point, the fact, the truth with which the speaker may be dealing. In this vision we must be very careful not to force meaning into what is mere setting, mere background.

*Dean Stanley* brings out the true points of this speech of Micaiah's. In the vision which he describes, we feel that we are gradually drawing nearer to the times of the later prophets. It is a vision which might rank amongst those of Isaiah or of Ezekiel. . . . Above, we see the God of Israel on His throne, as the kings on their thrones before the gate of Samaria. His host, as theirs, is all around Him. There is a glimpse into the truth, so difficult of conception in early ages, that even the Almighty works by secondary agents. Not by

Himself, but by one or other of His innumerable hosts ; not by these indiscriminately, but by one, to whom is given the name of 'the spirit.' Not by any sudden stroke of vengeance, but by the very network of evil counsel which he has woven for himself, is the King of Israel to be led to his ruin. The imagery of the vision of Micaiah is the first germ of the prologue of Job, and conveys the same exalted glance into the unseen guidance of good and evil by the same overruling Hand.'

The 'Speaker's Commentary' supports the view taken in the first paragraph. 'It may be doubted whether we ought to take literally, and seek to interpret exactly, each statement of the present narrative. Visions of the invisible world can only be a sort of parables ; revelations, not of the truth as it actually is, but of so much of the truth as can be shown through such a medium. The details of a vision, therefore, cannot safely be pressed, any more than the details of a parable. Portions of each must be accommodations to human modes of thought, and may very inadequately express the realities which they are employed to shadow forth to us.'

When the passage is thus relieved of any directly historical or descriptive features, there yet remains the difficulty that God appears to be working out His purposes by the use of evil agencies.

God is often said in Scripture to *do* what we are to understand Him as *permitting* and overruling. He who is supreme Governor of the world has to deal with the fact that there are evil forces, products of man's self-will, working in the world, and that much of human conduct is due to the incitement of these evil forces. Ambitions, selfishnesses, deceptions, malice, revenge, conceit, and similar evil things are the keys to men's actions and to men's influence on their fellows. He who proposes to rule the world to righteous issues cannot be indifferent to these things ; He cannot at once resist them, consistently with His purpose of securing the moral recovery of the world by moral means. He can so far accept them, and use them or overrule them to the outworking of His ends, making the wickedness, as well as the wrath, of men praise Him.

What God can thus righteously do may be apprehended by observing the methods which parents and school-teachers find it necessary sometimes to adopt. In the family or the school certain evil influences are known to be at work, but the parent or teacher does not think it wise to interfere for a time. In effect they say, 'Let the evil work itself out into open shame and calamity. Let the evil show itself in its natural consequences.' We see no wrong in parents and teachers thus using and overruling existing evil forces.

In the case of Ahab we have indeed the further difficulty of a lying spirit being spoken of as a person in the Divine employ. But, without attempting to deal with the vexed question of the personality of the so-called Satan, it may be remarked that this allusion should be interpreted by the conception, common to all religions recognising the terrible existence of evil in the world, of a spiritual power of evil (called euphemistically 'the spirit') overruled to work out the judgments of God. The absolute subordination of such spirits of evil in every notice of them in the Old Testament precludes all danger of the monstrous dualism of so many Eastern religions.

The point to keep in mind is, that Ahab was a man actually under the Divine sentence, but his sentence was to be executed in the ordinary way of Providence, and not by a special visitation. If, through the vision of Micaiah, we are permitted to see the course and working of those providences, it is that Ahab and his people might fail to see Divine *judgment* in what would look so much like a mere accident of the battle-field. Jezebel's dreadful death would not be misunderstood; but Ahab's more ordinary death might be. So we must be plainly shown that it also was a carrying out of the Divine sentence on the man whose covetous soul was stained with the blood of the innocent.

*Ewald* gives the above explanation in the following sentences: Micaiah, 'in unmistakable language, designated the spirit of the false prophet as the Divine instrument for deluding and seducing Ahab into the impending war. The cause of Ahab's being seduced into marching on the expedition in which he is doomed to fall, is, in the last resort, Jahveh Himself, against whom he has so deeply erred. But, as the best instrument for that purpose, Jahveh employs the spirit, consequently the spirit of the false prophets. From these truths arises the grand representation in 1 Kings xxii. 19-23, which in vividness and power rivals that in Job i. 6, etc., and yet only carries into further detail the briefer utterance of Isa. xix. 14.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'God punishes Ahab by means of his own sin. He "chooses" Ahab's "delusions" as the means of Ahab's destruction, and makes Ahab's own backslidings to reprove him. Ahab had preferred lies to Him who is the Truth; and He who is the Truth will make the lies which Ahab prefers to be the instruments of punishing him who love them, and of avenging the cause of Him who is the Truth.'

*Matthew Henry* gives the following wise warning to the readers of this narrative: 'The matter is here represented after the manner of men. We are not to imagine that God is ever put upon new counsels,

or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect His purposes, nor that He needs to consult with angels, or any creature, about the methods He should take, nor that He is the author of sin, or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie.'

## The Assassination of Eglon.

JUDGES iii. 15, 20, 21: 'But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a saviour, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a man left handed . . . . And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.'

**Difficulty.**—*This assertion that Ehud's act was done in fulfilment of a Divine commission strangely confuses our minds concerning the shameful wickedness of all assassinations, but more especially of treacherous ones.*

**Explanation.**—As in so many other cases, we must distinguish in this record between the actual facts that took place and the sentiment entertained about those facts at the time, or when, a little later, they were reviewed and recorded by the author of our Scripture narrative. So far as the Bible is a book produced under ordinary human conditions, we must treat it as we do other books. We always endeavour to distinguish between the facts which an author may give and the opinions about those facts which he may think it right to express. We accept his facts, but we may possess clearer light and fuller knowledge, and, in consequence, we may have quite different opinions about the facts.

Writing about Ehud with the sentiments of that age, and with the special ideas and prejudices of a Hebrew, the author of this book of Judges gives us both historical facts and his opinions about them. But we, knowing more fully the mind of God, and having His fuller revelation, cannot but criticise his opinions. We see no signs of a special commission to assassinate given by God to Eglon. Patriotism produces such deliverers over and over again in the world's history. No one ventures to assert that any Divine direction was given to Brutus, who assassinated Julius Cæsar, or to Charlotte Corday, who assassinated Marat.

Treachery and assassination can never be else than grievously offensive to God. It is crime against man, against social order, and against His rule; and no circumstances can possibly make assassination a right or a good thing. All that we can say is, that He who overrules both men's evil and men's good can make even the results of men's treachery and murder work towards the fulfilment of His

gracious purposes. Ehud may have thought himself swayed by a Divine impulse ; a delivered people may have put a glamour round his act, and spoken of it as religious as well as patriotic ; but nothing can prevent our calling his deed what it really was—a foul, treacherous, and dreadful murder. The wickedness of it no sort of explanation should be permitted to relieve.

*Kitto* well says : ‘ We cannot praise his achievement, nor sympathize with it, attended as it was by circumstances of barbarity and deceit. But some allowance may be made for the views, different from ours, but into which human nature is still prone to relapse, of the obligation or rights of patriotic enthusiasm.’

*Starke* says : ‘ Ehud kills Eglon, the tyrant of Israel ; yet he is not properly a murderer, but only a warrior. However, it is better to conquer as Othniel and Gideon conquered. He did it, not for private revenge, nor from fanaticism, but for the just freedom of Israel and its religion. God raised him up, but yet the Word of God does not approve his deed. He was a deliverer of Israel, but there hangs a shadow, nevertheless, over his official activity. Therefore, no murderous passion can appeal to Him. By Him no tyrant-murder, no political assassination, is exculpated.’

This subject is very wisely and suggestively treated by *Lord Arthur Hervey*, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, in a note in the ‘Speaker’s Commentary.’ ‘Many commentators defend Ehud’s action in stabbing Eglon on the ground of his having a direct command from Almighty God to do so, which, they would argue, justified the action in the same way as the execution of a legal sentence is justified by the authority of a State. But this is in every sense most unsafe and unwarrantable ground to take. The true solution of the difficulty seems to lie in distinguishing between two wholly distinct things—God’s providential government of the world and God’s moral law. God providentially brings about His own purposes by the good actions of men, by their bad actions, and by actions of all the various shades between good and bad (Gen. xxvii. 9, 10, etc. ; 1. 20 ; Acts ii. 23). But this has nothing whatever to do with the right or wrong of such actions. That is decided solely by God’s immutable moral law. In judging, however, of the nature of an action in its relation to the agent, there are many considerations which must greatly modify our judgment. Acts of violence or cunning, for instance, done in an age when the whole human society applauded such acts, when the best men of the age thought them right, and when men were obliged to take the law into their own hands in self-defence, is a very different thing from the same acts done in an age when the enlightened con-

science of men generally condemn them, and when the law of the land and the law of nations give individuals adequate security. The application of these principles to Ehud's history is obvious. . . . We can admire Ehud's faith and courage and patriotism without being blind to those defective views of moral right which made him and his countrymen glory in an act which in the light of Christianity is a crime. It is remarkable that neither Ehud nor Jael are in St. Paul's list in Heb. xi. 32.'

It is interesting to find Ehud's act almost precisely repeated in modern history. *L'Estoile*, quoted by *Guizot* in his 'History of France,' tells of the assassination of Henry III. of France by the Dominican monk Jacques Clement, who had provided himself with a commission from a friend of the King. 'On Tuesday, Aug. 1, at 8 a.m., the King was told that a monk desired to speak with him. The King ordered him to be admitted. The monk entered, having in his sleeve a knife, unsheathed. He made a profound reverence to the King, who had just got up, and had nothing but a dressing-gown on, and presented him despatches from the Count de Brienne, saying that he had further orders to tell the King privately something of importance. Then the King ordered those who were present to retire, and began reading the letter. The monk, seeing his attention engaged, drew his knife from his sleeve, and drove it right into the King's small gut, below the navel, so home that he left the knife in the hole.'

### Elisha's Practical Joke.

2 KINGS vi. 19 : 'And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city : follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.'

**Difficulty.**—*Was not such practical joking quite unworthy of a prophet of the Lord ; and in carrying it out did not Elisha speak untruthfully?*

**Explanation.**—*Matthew Henry* gives the best suggestion towards the true estimate of this incident. He says : 'They thought to make a prey of him ; but he made fools of them, perfectly played with them, so far was he from fearing them or any damage by them.' Under certain circumstances playfulness may be the best spirit in which to meet a difficulty. Nothing gives confidence, and removes fear in time of danger, like the cheerful, merry spirit. That is one of the lessons taught us by the career of Samson, who lived at a time when the Philistines were crushing the very heart out of the people of Israel. Samson helped them to laugh at the Philistines, on whom

he played tricks, and the laugh relieves fear. In much the same way the King of Israel was at this time fearing the Syrians, and Elisha did an important thing by turning the laugh upon them. Witnessing for Jehovah, it was needful that he should show his absolute confidence in the Divine defence. He could not show it more effectually than by actually playing with the army which had come to take his life.

The incident may be further explained from another point of view. The King of Syria had been trying stratagems, so Elisha only pays him back with his own coin, and wins the triumph over him by adopting his own methods. The King of Syria planned secret ambush again and again, but of his schemes Elisha duly informed the King of Israel. Then the Syrian sent secretly to spy out where Elisha was, and having found his temporary lodging, by a swift night-march surrounded the place, and thought to seize his person. It was a trick. It might well have caused fear: it did in the case of the servant. Elisha met stratagem by stratagem; instead of waiting for the army to seize him, he went boldly out to them, as if he were the head man of the village, told them they had come to the wrong place, and he would guide them to the man whom they sought.

The untruthfulness of Elisha's words can only be excused by the universally recognised permissions of a state of war. Efforts have indeed been made to show that Elisha kept within the bounds of strict truth; that his home was not at Dothan, but at Samaria, to which place he led the army. It is better, however, to accept the narrative as it stands, without such questionable explanations. 'Untruth has been held by all moralists to be justifiable towards a public enemy. Where we have a right to kill, much more have we a right to deceive by stratagem.'

Apart from the miraculous feature of the story—the strange delusion which came over the Syrians, like a mental blindness—we can plainly see that they were outwitted; and the playful manner in which this was done was in harmony with the homely spirit of Elisha, and effective in removing from the nation all fear of its irritating and quarrelsome neighbour. The narrative also helps us to realize the very important truth, that God is never limited in His methods; He can save by many or by few; in stern ways of destruction, or in lighter ways of playful stratagem, if so He pleases. 'Nothing is too hard for the Lord.'

## The Gibeonite Wiliness.

JOSHUA ix. 3, 4: 'But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho, and to Ai, they also did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors.'

**Question.**—*How was it that Joshua was deceived with such a very transparent device, and acted with so little consideration?*

**Answer.**—Because he trusted to his own judgment, and did not seek counsel from God. The lesson of the narrative is precisely this—that even the man of God is weak when he 'follows the devices and desires of his own heart,' and fails from that constant, immediate, and direct reference of all things to God which is the essential characteristic of his life. Joshua had to learn, by a humiliating experience, the very lesson which our Lord taught His disciples: 'Without Me ye can do nothing.'

It seems that the 'situation and character of Gibeon placed it in an exceptional position. Planted at the head of the Pass of Beth-horon, and immediately opposite the opening of the Pass of Ai, it would have been the next prey on which the Israelite host would have sprung. Their device is full of a quaint humour which marks its antiquity.'

*Thomson*, the author of 'Land and Book,' writes thus about this incident: 'Gibeon is situated on an isolated and rocky hill of moderate elevation, with plains, valleys, and higher mountains all around it. Remains of ancient buildings, tombs, and quarries indicate a large and important city. . . . These old Gibeonites did indeed "work wilily" with Joshua. Nothing could be better calculated to deceive than their devices. I have often thought that their ambassadors, as described in the narrative, furnish one of the finest groups imaginable for a painter; with their old sacks on their poor asses, their wine-bottles of goat-skin, patched and shrivelled up in the sun, old, rent, and bound up; old shoes and clouted upon their feet; old garments, ragged and bedraggled, with bread dry and mouldy—the very picture of an over-travelled and wearied caravan from a great distance. It is impossible to transfer to paper the ludicrous appearance of such a company. No wonder that, having tasted their mouldy victuals, and looked upon their soiled and travel-worn costume, Joshua and the elders were deceived, especially as they did not wait to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord.'

It is quite possible that the stratagem by which Joshua seized Ai suggested to the Gibeonites their device. They resolved to meet

craft with craft. Joshua played with dangerous weapons. Others could use them against him, and we may well suppose that the bitter humiliation which came from the deception of these Gibeonites made him resolve henceforward to use only straightforward agencies. The expression used in the Hebrew is 'they, *too*, did work wilily,' as if they had designedly imitated Joshua's own method.

## The Mission of the Canaanites left in the Land.

JUDGES ii. 21, 22: 'I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died; that by them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.'

**Difficulty.**—*Surely this decision of God's provides the Israelites with a reasonable excuse for their subsequent idolatries. They might fairly plead that their God had determined to leave temptation and evil in their midst.*

**Explanation.**—There is scarcely any subject which is so difficult to state with precision and clearness as that of the possibility of God's changing His plans and methods of working. Yet, if He is to adjust His dealings to men of variable wills it is plain that a course of action resolved on in view of one set of men's circumstances must be altered if those circumstances are altered. We do not see that adjustments of decisions and plans in our family life involve any untruthfulness or uncertainty or untrustworthiness in parents; we rather look upon such readjustments as signs of parental wisdom. The Divine foreknowledge can make no real difference. Whatever God may absolutely know, His conduct at any given time must be regulated by the circumstances of the time.

The Israelites, therefore, would have no right to excuse themselves or their idolatries and corruptions by the plea that God had changed His plans in relation to them, and the new plans had put them under serious disability, unless they could show that *they had never changed towards Him*. If they had so changed, then the new conditions might be no more than wise and necessary readjustments.

The whole force of the narrative goes to the urging of the fact that Israel had changed first, and because there were new conditions there must be new arrangements.

That the new relations were both wise and necessary can be readily shown. The allegiance of the people to Jehovah had become a matter of uncertainty. Their profession of allegiance remained, indeed, what it had been; but the expression of that allegiance, in

obedience to the Divine commands, was, to say the least, rendered very doubtful. But it must be settled; and settled not by words uttered under the excitements of a great national assembly, but by the Divine observation of the conduct and the spirit of daily life. Then there must be testing. Testing can only come through temptation to evil. Evil and good must be plainly put before men, and their decision must be demanded. This may, however, be one single great act of decision or a continued series of acts. In this particular case God required a series of testings; and, by leaving the idolatrous Canaanites in close daily association with Israel, put evil and good before the people, asking their daily decision which they would choose.

If the allegiance of moral beings, who have once fallen, is to be efficiently tested, it can only be by the actual presence of temptation to evil, which compels a constant moral decision. It is the further mystery of the Divine wisdom that what is designed as a test may become the instrument of Divine punishment, and so the vindication of the Divine claims.

*Bishop Wordsworth* adds another thought. 'God in His mercy overrules evil for good. He commanded the Israelites to root out the Canaanites. Israel disobeyed the command; and God's next purpose is, that good may be derived by Israel from them, that the faith, patience, and steadfastness of Israel may be tried and exercised by them, and so may receive a reward.'

### Abraham's Prevarication.

GENESIS xii. 11-13: 'Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake, and that my soul may live because of thee.'

**Question.**—*Can such an incident be recorded in Scripture for our imitation?*

**Answer.**—It is too easily assumed that what has been preserved in the Bible concerning the actions of good men must all be good; and so very unworthy efforts have been made to explain or to excuse what can neither be explained nor excused, but must be accepted as failures and faults. We do not expect living good men to show a record absolutely free from blame; and we need look for no faultless stories concerning the good that are dead. A man may be an example in many things, and a warning in some things. Scripture histories are truthful records: they differ from common histories and biographies in having a distinctly moral intent; so they do not slur over or hide moral failings, but present them, assuming that we have

standards by which all incidents and actions must be appraised. In Holy Scripture we plainly see that the 'best men are but men at the best.' Old Testament saints are compassed by infirmity, and are foils that set off the unique glory of the Man, Christ Jesus, who was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' We are not, therefore, called upon to approve of the conduct of Abraham in this instance, if it offends the sense of the truthful and the trustful which has been given us by the regenerating Spirit.

The sin of Abraham appears to have been a failure in that very faith for which he is so specially commended. He had not confidence in God that He would preserve both himself and Sarah from the perils to which they would be exposed by going among the licentious Egyptians. Because his trust failed him, he was set upon crafty devices, and out of the shame they brought him learned another lesson of faith.

But Abraham's conduct is not usually judged with fairness and competency of knowledge. It is readily assumed that he hit upon his deception hastily, under pressure of fear; but chapter xx. 13 shows that Abraham made a definite arrangement with Sarah, when they left Haran together, that in this way they would meet the perils which Sarah's unusual beauty might place them in. On two occasions the scheme was tried, but exactly how it appeared to Abraham and his wife the wisest plan to adopt only a better knowledge than we have of the sentiments and customs of the age could explain to us.

*Kitto* gives some help. It appears that an Eastern king may take possession of the sisters or daughters of a subject at his pleasure, returning handsome presents as dowries for them. The persons so taken would undergo a process of purification in the harem, which usually lasted for some months (see Esther ii. 12). But to take a man's wife from him against his will would be such an outrage as even the Oriental habit of submission to despotic authority would not long endure.

Abraham's device seems to have been intended merely to gain time. Such was the beauty of Sarah that there was grave reason to fear the report of her would at once reach the king of any country to which they might sojourn, and, with high-handed tyranny, Abraham's life might be taken for her sake. Letting her go to the harem as his sister involved no immediate risk for her, and gave him time to take measures for securing her return to him.

'In this practical difficulty Abraham's faith failed. He fell back upon "devices," and lost his trust. The man who is consciously in

Divine hands need not plan and plot, need not devise and equivocate; he may simply follow the Divine lead with assurance of perfect safety.'

Craft is the weak side of the strong Abrahamic race; the evil into which their characteristic quality runs. Their caution and skill in retaining what they possess, which makes the Jews good bankers and money-lenders, made them suitable for the Divine purpose as depositaries of the primary religious truths, and their conservators until the fulness of times should come. But caution easily degenerates into craft and guile. In Abraham we find traces of the evil which comes out prominently in Jacob.

'Such a mixture of faith and weakness, of trust in God in abandoning so much and trust in worldly policy for preservation in a foreseen danger, cannot but make us feel how much of infirmity there was in a character otherwise so noble.'

The 'Speaker's Commentary' draws this conclusion: 'We see in the conduct of Abram an instance of one under the influence of deep religious feeling and true faith in God, but yet with a conscience imperfectly enlightened as to many moral duties, and when leaning to his own understanding suffered to fall into great error and sin. The candour of the historian is shown by his exhibiting in such strong relief the dissimulation of Abram as contrasted with the straightforward integrity of Pharaoh.'

Some effort has been made to give undue value to the fact that what Abraham wished said was absolutely true. This indeed was the patriarch's own excuse. Sarah was his half-sister. But we must not blind ourselves to the fact that he *intended to deceive*; when he said, 'she is my sister,' he distinctly meant them to understand 'she is not my wife.' It was a case of untruthfulness, not by the assertion of what is false, but by the concealing of what is true, so as designedly to leave a false impression.

## The Entire Destruction of the Canaanite Population

JOSHUA viii. 26-28: 'For Joshua drew not back his hand, wherewith he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai . . . . So Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation, unto this day.'

**Question.**—*Is not such terrible sternness in strange contradiction to the mercy inculcated elsewhere in the Bible, and even to the instincts of human nature?*

**Answer.**—A reasonable, calm, and careful consideration of the subject will lead us in three directions. It must be first asked, what

were the prevailing customs of the time in relation to conquered countries? Then it may be shown that the national condition of the Canaanites called for an overwhelming national judgment. And the outworking of Jehovah's purpose concerning His people necessitated the cleansing of the land they occupied from all idolatrous associations.

On the first point, it may suffice to observe that the killing of all the men, or even of all the population, of a conquered town was the common practice in war. On the 'Moabite Stone,' for instance, King Mesha says: 'I fought against the city (Ataroth, of the tribe of Gad), and took it, and slaughtered all the men, to please Chemosh, the god of Moab.' 'I took the town Nebo (from Israel), and put to the sword all its inhabitants, seven chiefs of the tribes . . . the women and the children; for Chemosh had uttered a curse against it.' It might even be urged that Joshua's immediate slaughter of the people was merciful in view of the prevailing customs of the age. The following is taken from a boastful inscription recording the deeds of the Assyrian King, Assur-Nasir-Pal, who reigned from B.C. 885 to B.C. 860:

'They brought me word  
That the city of Suri had revolted . . . .  
Chariots and army I collected. From the rebellious nobles  
I stripped off their skin and made them into a trophy.  
Some I left in the middle of the pile to decay;  
Some I impaled on the top of the hill, on stakes.  
I flayed many within view of my land, and  
Arranged their skins on the walls.  
I brought Ahiyababa to Nineveh. I flayed him and  
Fastened his skin to the wall.'

How directly the estimate formed of actions done in war-times depends on the public sentiments prevailing at the time may be brought home to those who are fifty or sixty years of age, if they recall the impressions they had in early life of the terrible scenes of siege and battle in India and in Spain, and contrast the very different sentiments with which they now read the siege of Badajoz, the conquest of Mexico, or the horrors of warfare in India. *Dr. Geikie* well says: 'The humanity of our day has been attained only by the development of right feelings through thousands of years, and implies a public sentiment which the world in Joshua's days, and for ages after, was wholly unable to comprehend or accept.'

But we can regard this destruction of the Canaanite population from higher standpoints. It is necessary, however, for us to keep very clearly before us the distinction between the Divine judgment on individuals for their personal sins and the Divine judgment on public

bodies for corporate sins, and on nations for national sins. Judgments on nations as such must take national forms, and must be wrought out by such agencies as depressed trade, drought, famine, pestilence, or war—things that affect masses of men, and not merely isolated individuals or families.

It will be freely admitted that the Canaanite nations might come into Divine judgment; that such judgment might decree their extermination; that the agency employed might be an invading army; and that this invading army might be the Israelite one. The Canaanites were themselves only sojourners on the soil of Palestine. They only held it for a while during good behaviour. And the only question which really needs to be settled is this: Have we sufficient evidence that the 'iniquity of the Canaanites was full,' and that therefore judgment must take so severe a shape, and could be no longer delayed?

As proof that this was their condition we have the very remarkable fact that a premonitory warning had been given to the Canaanites more than four hundred years previously, in the utter destruction of the Cities of the Plain. There, under specially favourable circumstances, the horrible vices and corruptions of the Canaanites had reached a ripeness which made further delay of judgment impossible. After those four hundred years had passed the condition of the Canaanite population had become, in daring and utterly abominable iniquity, what Sodom had been. Apart, therefore, from any consideration of the precise agency used, the utter destruction of the corrupt nation was the inevitable judgment of God. Jericho, the first city utterly destroyed, was the local seat of the worship of Ashtoreth, the consort of Baal, its very name meaning the City of the Moon, which was the symbol of that goddess. Hence it represented all that was foulest and most revolting in the heathenism of the Canaanites. 'The heathenism of Palestine and Syria was so foul and degrading in every sense, that there is no state, even at this time, which would not put it down, if necessary, by the severest penalties. Its spread to Rome was bewailed 1500 years later by the satirists of the day as a calamity marking the utter decay of the times.'

The other consideration almost requires a treatise. The descendants of Abraham had been selected by God to preserve in the world the first and foundation-truths of the Unity, Purity, and Spirituality of God. It was therefore necessary that He should aid them in preserving these truths by surrounding them with all possible helpful circumstances, by removing from them all mischievous and imperil

ling influences. His design was to cleanse Palestine of all its idolatries, idolatrous symbols and relics, and of all its corrupt people, so as to provide a cleansed land, in which His people might safely dwell.

Now the preservation of these foundation-truths was for the whole world's sake, through all the ages; and from this point of view it seems but a very small thing that these mere sections of the Canaanite race should be sacrificed for the whole world's good. From one point of view, they were righteously judged for their national abominations. From another point of view, they were sacrificed to the permanent and eternal well-being of the whole human race.

The Israelites failed to carry out fully the Divine purpose. They left relics of Canaanite idolatries and immoralities in the land, and the result of their neglect brings plainly to view the wisdom and necessity for the wholesale destruction which had been commanded.

The highest 'mercy' often has to take form as 'judgment.' Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for Thou renderest to every man according to his work.' (Psalm lxii. 12.)

## Jephthah's Vow, and its Fulfilment.

JUDGES xi. 30, 31, 34-40: 'Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.'

**Difficulty.**—*Did Jephthah really offer up his daughter, and must we conceive of God as accepting such a sacrifice?*

**Explanation.**—Two views of this incident have been taken; these, with their reasons, may be first stated, and then a solution which may be regarded as satisfactory can be presented.

*Dr. Hewlett* takes the view that Jephthah did not slay his daughter in sacrifice, but that he separated her from her usual intercourse with human society, and consecrated her wholly to the service of God. This conclusion rests upon a special reading of verse 31: 'Thus shall it be, that that which cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall be to the Lord, and I will offer Him a burnt offering.' Read in this way, the suggestion is that the vow of Jephthah included two acts: the first that of devoting the favourite and trusty servant, who might come out to meet him, or even his only, his beloved child to the service of the Lord; and the second, that of offering a

burnt-offering as a thanksgiving, as the law provided in such circumstances (Lev. vii. 12-16). The conclusion further rests on the consideration that human sacrifices were forbidden by the law : also on the fact that Jephthah could have gained relief from a singular or *rash* vow by the payment of a fine (Lev. xxvii. 1-4). And Dr. Hewlett thinks the custom of the daughters of Israel was, four times a year to go and *converse with* the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

What has recently become known concerning human sacrifices in the earlier times adds much strength to the arguments of those who on the other hand, think Jephthah actually offered his daughter as burnt offering. Dr. Kitto, after carefully weighing all that can be said on either side, comes to the following conclusion : ' Wherefore, we are told that ' Jephthah did with his daughter according to his vow,' we, in full recollection of all the ingenious explanations which have been produced, and which we regret that our space does not allow us to examine, see no alternative but to conclude, although we would gladly avail ourselves of any fair ground of escape from that conclusion, that he offered her up in sacrifice. This is the sense conveyed by the ancient versions, and by the text of our own. It is also the statement of Josephus, though he is prone to extenuate or suppress that which he holds to be not for the honour of his nation ; while, at the same time, he considers it as a deplorable mistaken and unlawful act.

*Stanley* and *Ewald* support the idea of a literal burnt offering. The latter says : ' The Gileadite hero, in the fervour of his wrath against the Ammonite king and his zeal for Israel, had vowed to sacrifice to Jahveh whatever on his victorious return should first meet him from his own house. His thought was probably of a herd of cattle, or at most of slaves : not that his young daughter and only child would be the first to meet him. But, on his prosperous return to Mizpah, forth comes his daughter first from his house, leading ten maidens of the city with dance and song, in celebration of his victory. Fearfully is avenged upon the father and ruler the thoughtless vow of the soldier of a brutalized age. No Levite or other sacrificer arises to give a different direction to his conscientious resolve, for it is evident that his contemporaries, also trained to barbarism, considered the precious sacrifice to be appointed by a higher necessity fall for the sins of the fatherland. And when such a belief pervades even the best, the courage which shrinks not from acting or suffering in obedience to it must be accounted greatness of soul ; and equally so on both sides. Even so it is here. Not without bitter grief,

ill of resolve, and proud that she should be the sacrifice demanded by Jahveh to save her country, this worthy daughter of a hero, after bewailing her virginity for two months on the mountains among her companions, accepts the sacrificial death from the hands of her own father, who in her sacrifices all that is dearest to him.'

The 'Iliad' of Homer has a story helpfully like this of Jephthah. Minotaurus, of Crete, purchased from Poseidon a prosperous homeward voyage by the vow to oblige and sacrifice to him whatever should first meet him in his own land. He was consequently obliged to sacrifice his own son, but was punished by the gods with a plague, and by his fellow-citizens with banishment.

The most recent study of Jephthah is by *Van Lennep*, and this is interesting and suggestive, that it may be given in full. 'Many of the ancient heathen offered human victims to their gods. The Phoenicians and the Moabites burned their children to Moloch, and the Hebrews repeatedly fell into this form of idolatry (Jer. xxxii. 35 ; Ezek. xx. 31). Even the polished Greeks were very anciently addicted to the same superstition. These cruel rites have long ago disappeared from the lands of the Bible ; but mementos of the practice are occasionally met with. Such is a part of the ceremony letting the water of the Nile into the canals. The Arabic history Ben Ayas contains the following incident, which has probably some foundation in truth :—The Muslim conqueror of Egypt, Amroo, was asked permission by the people of that country, at the time of the opening of the Nile, to propitiate the river by the offering of a human sacrifice ; for, said they, "It is our custom on the 13th of the month of Meshir (June 7th) to select a young and handsome virgin ; we carry her away by force from her parents, and throw her into the Nile at the spot consecrated to this ceremony." Amroo forbade the cruel practice, and, instead of the virgin, cast into the Nile a paper, on which the Caliph Omar had written a prayer to God to furnish the water of the Nile.

Human sacrifices, indeed, still exist ; but they are mostly confined to the interior of Africa, whose climate and deserts render it difficult to bring access to the influence of civilization. The existence of human sacrifices is recognised in the Pentateuch by the provision made for "angular vows," which required the commission of murder. In all cases of this nature, money was to be paid instead, according to the value of the person. The story of Jephthah and his daughter shows how great a temptation existed for such a law. The Israelite hero was evidently ignorant of the legal provision made to meet his case. He lived in the same region—east of the Jordan—where human sacrifices were

most common, and where Moloch was the ruling Deity. Jephthah was a freebooter, a highway robber; he had neither priest nor prophet to guide him. His daughter herself was ready to die "Forasmuch as the Lord had taken vengeance upon his enemies, even the children of Ammon." And so, after two months' delay, "he did with her according to his vow." His family perished; for she was his only child, and "had known no man." The extraordinary character of the occurrence produced a deep impression upon the Israelites which was maintained by the yearly celebration of the day. It became a warning to the Hebrews against rash vows; and yet such an immolation of a daughter is far better than the heathen practice of giving her up to the obscene service of the idol temple, or even to the seclusion of a convent, Christian only in name.

In further illustration of the view, that Jephthah actually offered his daughter as a sacrifice, Bishop Hervey, in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' adds, 'If the words, "shall surely be the Lord's," had stood alone, Jephthah's vow might have been understood like Hannah's. But the words which follow preclude any other meaning than that Jephthah contemplated a human sacrifice. This need not, however, surprise us, when we recollect his Syrian birth and long residence in a Syrian city, where such fierce rites were probably common. The Syrians and Phœnicians were conspicuous among the ancient heathen nations for human sacrifices. Porphyry, quoted by Eusebius, says: 'The Phœnicians, in all great emergencies of war, or famine, or drought, used to designate by vote one of their nearest and dearest as a sacrifice to Saturn; and their descendants, the Carthaginians, sacrificed their finest children to the same god.' Eusebius also mentions the annual sacrifice of a virgin to Minerva at Laodicea in Syria. In 2 Kings iii. 27 there is a notable example in the sacrifice of his eldest son by the king of Moab. Gregory Nazianzen accuses the Emperor Julian of offering human sacrifices, and throwing the bodies into the Orontes in Syria. The worship of 'the gods of Syria and the gods of Zidon' is mentioned in Jud. x. 6 as prevalent among the Israelites at this time; and the transfer, under such circumstances, of Jehovah of the rite with which the false gods were honoured is just what one might expect. The circumstance of the spirit of the Lord coming on Jephthah (verse 29) is no difficulty, as it by no means follows that because the Spirit of God endued him with supernatural valour and energy for vanquishing the Ammonites, He therefore also endued him with spiritual knowledge and wisdom.'

The arguments in favour of an actual sacrifice decidedly preponderate. The other explanation could only have been suggested

by a desire to relieve the Bible of even a seeming approval of human sacrifice. But the Scriptures give us truthful records, without implying the commendation of what is recorded. No hint is given of the Divine acceptance of this dreadful burnt offering, or of Jephthah through it. There is nothing to commend in Jephthah save the sternness of his zeal, the vigour of his energy, and his firmness in keeping to his word.

It is fatal to the idea that the daughter was separated to the service of Jehovah, that no hint of such female dedications is given in scripture, and no provision for such persons was made in the Mosaic economy. Such a notion could never have entered Jephthah's head. We have no instance of females being devoted to celibacy; and if his girl were so devoted, she needed not to ask delay in order to bewail her lot.' *Matthew Henry* remarks that 'probably the reason why it is left dubious by the inspired penman whether he sacrificed her or no was that those who did afterwards offer their children might not take any encouragement from this instance.' *Dean Stanley* with keener sympathy, cleverly remarks: 'Then comes the awful end, from which the sacred writer, as it were, averts his eyes. "He did with her according to his vow." In her the house of Jephthah became extinct.'

## The Prophetic Curse on the Site of Jericho.

JOSHUA vi. 26: 'And Joshua charged them with an oath at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: with the loss of his firstborn shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Is not such a curse on a mere thing or place an expression of human vengeance, on which we cannot suppose the Divine approval to rest?*

**Explanation.**—Seeing we are taught by signs, symbols, and events, as well as by written or spoken words, we may recognise that God uses such signs and events for His gracious purposes. Our Lord sealed the Divine approval of teaching by events when He used the fig-tree, which was a symbol of the hypocrite. If the city Jericho was the representative or symbol of something, then the vine dealing with it may have been the holding forth of some truth, the permanent good of passing generations; and this appears to be the explanation of the remarkable curse. Jericho, as the first city of Canaan taken by the Israelites, was made a representative for ever of judgment that must always come upon those who live in defiance of God, and in self-willed corruption of life. The bare site of Jericho

was for ages to impress this lesson : 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

*Kitto* says : 'This course, of making a monument of a conquered and destroyed city or building, by solemnly interdicting the restoration thereof, has not a few parallels in ancient history. Thus the Romans made a decree full of execration against any who should dare at any future time to rebuild Carthage, which had been their rival in empire, and the situation of which was so advantageous as to create the fear that it might be restored. Similar imprecations were pronounced by Agamemnon against such as should rebuild Troy, and by Croesus against those who should restore Sidene, "according to ancient custom," says Strabo, by whom the fact is reported.'

The 'Speaker's Commentary' has a suggestion intended to meet the difficulty that Jericho seems to have been inhabited soon after its destruction ; and it shows that the idea of a new city having been built *near*, but not exactly *on*, the old site is a mere imagination. The 'Commentary' says that the word translated 'buildeth' is one distinctly meaning 'buildeth the fortifications,' and with this as its evident meaning the word is repeatedly used in the Moabite inscription 'Joshua then speaks in the text as a warrior. He lays a ban on the re-erection of those lofty walls, which had bidden defiance to God's host, and been by God's signal interposition overthrown. The plain import of 1 Kings xvi. 34 is, that Hiel, the Bethelite, reckless of the prophecy recorded in our text, began and completed the circumvallation of the city a second time. It is obvious that Hiel did not found a new city, but only fortified an existing one.'

Joshua himself gave Jericho to the Benjamites, and it was inhabited in the time of the Judges (see Jud. iii. 13 ; 2 Sam. x. 5).

## Uzzah's Sin and Judgment.

2 SAMUEL vi. 6, 7 : 'And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacoth Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it ; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error ; and there he died by the ark of God' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Uzzah evidently meant well ; how is it that God did not recognise and accept his good intentions ?*

**Explanation.**—God may be pleased to teach other men impressive lessons through His providential dealings with individuals. What happens to a man may be vicarious. Though in measure related to his sin, its explanation may be found rather in the influence exerted on others as a warning. This we can see, and readily adm

in relation to punishments that stop short of death ; but the irremediable character of death creates difficulty. A man may seem to be destroyed for the sake of others.

Our age has lost the impressive sense of God's absolute right in man, which was a characteristic of Eastern and Hebrew thought. The right of kings to the property and life of their subjects was transferred to God ; and it was understood that man must be ready to serve God in death as well as in life.

The sin for which Uzzah died was David's ; and Uzzah was a vicarious sufferer. He died to awaken David to the importance of *exact* obedience to God's injunctions. He was an example of disobedience in touching the Ark, for which the stumbling of the oxen seemed a good excuse. The example, and the judgment following, opened David's eyes to see his disobedience in putting the Ark on a cart, when God had commanded that it should only be carried on the shoulders of the Levites.

God did recognise the good intentions of Uzzah, and we must clearly distinguish between the temporal judgment on his failing in ceremonial obedience, and the eternal judgment which comes on wilful sin. But it was important that a solemn, impressive lesson should at this time be learned, to the effect that good intentions can never excuse failures in obedience. Man may persuade himself that some way which he devises is better than God's way for him ; but it can never be accepted : man must simply obey. Come what may—the Ark fall—still Uzzah must not touch it. So regarded, Uzzah's sudden death is one of the most impressive Bible teachings on the necessity for *exact obedience*—a lesson which we need quite as much as David did.

*Dr. Edersheim* says : ' The arrangements which David had made for the transport of the Ark differed in one most important particular from those which God had originally prescribed. According to God's ordinance (Numb. iv.) the Ark was only to be handled by the Levites—for symbolical reasons—nor was any other even to touch it (Numb. iv. 15). Moreover, the Levites were to carry it on their shoulders, and not to place it in a waggon. But the arrangements which David had made for the transport of the Ark were those of the Athen Philistines when they restored it to Israel (1 Sam. vi. 7), not those of the Divine ordinance. If such was the case on the part of the king, we can scarcely wonder at the want of reverence on the part of the people. It was a question of the safe transport of a sacred vessel, not of the reverent handling of the very symbol of the Divine essence.'

*Kitto* says : ' It was necessary, for His own honour, for the welfare of His people, and for the integrity of the institutions He had committed to them, that the Lord should rigidly exact a proper and ordained reverence for the sacred symbols. If at all necessary there was never an occasion in which it could be more so than on this great public solemnity.'

*Bishop Sanderson* has a very valuable note : ' This inadvertency of Uzzah, notwithstanding the innocence of his intention, brought down the Divine vengeance on his head, which struck him with present death, before the whole assembly of the people, as the punishment of his presumption. And by this severe stroke upon the first violator of the law, God impressed a dread upon the hearts of men, and gave sanction to His commands that no man should attempt, *upon any pretence whatever*, to act in defiance of His law, or boldly to dispense with what God has established.'

### Samson's Sensuality.

JUDGES xvi. 1 : ' And Samson went to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.'

**Question.**—*Can we suppose that the things Samson did met with the Divine approval ?*

**Answer.**—No hint of any such approval is given in the Scriptural records, and no such approval is implied in the fact that successes were permitted to attend his extraordinary adventures.

Attention needs to be often drawn to the fact, that the Divine approbation of a man does not involve the favourable regard of every action of the man, or of every event in the man's life. In these days we frequently find marked genius associated with marked frailties. Men who are remarkable for mental, poetical, or artistic gifts are sometimes morally weak, and the weakness not seldom takes the form of unrestrained passion and sensual indulgence. Humanity finds, however, no difficulty in recognising and accepting the fruits of the poetical genius of Byron and Shelley, while it expresses the uttermost disgust at the moral looseness of both these men. And we can well understand that God can accept the faithfully used physical strength of Samson, without any kind of approval of his sensuality.

There is this further to be said : In estimating all persons who occupy public positions in God's service, we must distinguish between their official and their personal goodness. A man may be a good servant, but a bad man ; a good officer, but evil in private life. And in Scripture we find some men are set before us for imitation of the

personal virtues, while others are only to be imitated so far as they executed with earnestness and skill some public duty. The mission of Samson is difficult to understand, but it is quite clear that he is commended only for the public and national influence for good which he exerted.

The notion commonly entertained that men of unusual bodily size are usually also unduly strong in bodily passion, has been fixed for us in the nursery tale of the Giant Blue Beard. Sensuality seems to have been the imperilling side of Samson's great bodily strength.

It is curious to notice that Samson's great deeds are more or less directly connected with his sensual practices; and when we observe the story carefully we find that he did not deliver Israel, or even attempt to deliver it. There is nothing patriotic about his deeds of prowess; all is strictly personal, and much of what is told us belongs to the 'revengeful.' Perhaps Samson's life and mission are only to be explained as we realize the abject and hopeless condition of the Israelites in his time. Their arms had been taken away; Philistines easily overran the country, and the two nations seem in a sense to have blended. All hope had faded out of the souls of the Israelites; there was the quiet gloom of a settled despair over all the land.

It is only said that Samson '*began* to deliver Israel;' and his work seems to have been to lift up the national spirit by raising the laugh against the Philistine enemy. Perhaps the coarseness and the practical joking which were so characteristic of him were just the thing to make the Israelites despise their enemy. Samson's wild pranks could be talked over, and laughed over, at every evening meal, and a cheerier and more hopeful spirit in the people would prepare the way for future active efforts to regain the national liberty. There have been times in the history of all nations when wit, satire, ballad, and even practical joking, have been the first agencies in national revival. God, who overrules the wrath of man, has been pleased to overrule the playfulness of men. Only we require to see that the use of such things as public forces in no way involves the Divine acceptance of the *persons* who put forth those various powers.

In support of this line of explanation two or three trustworthy estimates of Samson's character and mission are given.

Dealing with the fact that Samson accomplished so little in connection with the national deliverance, *Kitto* says: 'This can only be counted for by his great destinies having been marred by his vices and indiscretions, which incapacitated him from acting efficiently as the leader of the people. It seems to us that the people were com-

pletely justified in withholding their confidence from him. A mere slave of the senses like him, who could repeatedly sacrifice or endanger the most important interests to a woman's sigh, was not one into whose hands the elders and warriors of Israel could entrust their lives and fortunes. He has left a name which is at once a miracle and a byword, a glory and a shame.'

Referring to his being the first Nazarite, *Dean Stanley* says : 'It is one of the many distinctions between the manners of the East and West, between ancient and modern forms of religious feeling, that the Jewish chief whose position most nearly resembles that of the founder of a monastic order should be the most frolicsome, irregular, uncultivated creature that the nation ever produced. Not only was celibacy no part of his Nazarite obligations, but not even purity of life. He was full of the spirits and the pranks, no less than of the strength, of a giant.'

*Ewald* makes the following very searching remarks on the probable influence on Samson of the vow : 'So long as the vow is only a sacred force constraining the soul from without, it can never have full freedom of action and development, but must rather relax in one direction the powers which in another are unnaturally strained. Samson keeps his vow of abstinence from intoxication, but is all the weaker and wilder with regard to the love of woman, as if he could here make up for the want of freedom elsewhere ; and by a singular sport of chance, or rather by the secret revenge of a heart warped by the vow, his love is always excited by women of that very race which the vow urges him to combat with all the might of his arm, and on whose men the weight of his iron strength always falls at the right time.'

## Jealousy as ascribed to God.

EXODUS xx. 5 : 'For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me.'

**Difficulty.**—*Do not our associations with the word 'jealous' make it altogether an unsuitable word to apply to God ?*

**Answer.**—The word 'jealous' is used in two closely related, but very distinct, senses. In the one sense it means suspicion, apprehensive of rivalry ; uneasy under the fear that another may or have engaged the affections of one whom we love. This is our most familiar association with the word, but in these senses it cannot possibly be applied to God.

The other shade of meaning may be expressed by the terms 'eager

or anxious for one's rights or claims; hence, watchful, vigilant; 'solicitous for the name or character of;' 'vindicating the honour of.' In this sense the word may be applied to God.

If the necessity for what is called anthropomorphism and anthropopathism, or the revelation of God to man, under the figures of man's actions and feelings, were better understood, we should be able to admit that natural feelings, which in man may be both right and wrong, may, in their right forms, be applied to God; and then we should have no difficulty in fixing proper associations with the word 'jealous' when we applied it to God.

'Anthropomorphic expressions are those which attribute to the Creator the bodily faculties of man; and anthropopathic are those which attribute to the Infinite Spirit the mental affections and passions of man. In one case God is spoken of as having eyes, as inclining His ear, as stretching forth His arm, as uttering His voice, and sometimes as shouting (Jer. xxv. 30) or blowing a trumpet (Zech. ix. 14), also as riding on a cherub, and flying upon the wings of the wind (Psalm xviii. 10). In the other case He is represented as being jealous, as hating, as repenting, as taking vengeance, etc.'

*E. W. Robertson* says: 'Only through man can God be known; only through a perfect man perfectly revealed.'

*Woolwrych* says: 'In Numbers v. we read of "a spirit of jealousy" coming upon a man about his wife, and also of an "offering of jealousy." This explains in what sense God is said to be jealous, the intimate relation, corresponding to the marital one, between Him and His people, being referred to. The godly *zelos* with which St. Paul was jealous over the Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 2), points in the same direction, and *zelos* is the Septuagintal rendering of *kinah*, the Hebrew word alone translated "jealousy" in the Old Testament.'

The point which needs to be clearly apprehended is, that while the term 'jealousy' commonly bears a bad meaning, it does not necessarily imply evil passion. It may be right for a man to be jealous. He ought to be jealous of his treasure, his trusts, his good name, those he loves, etc. Then we have a right and good meaning attaching to the word, which may be in our minds when we apply it to God.

## Jael's Treachery.

JUDGES iv. 17-22; v. 24-27: 'Blessed above women shall Jael be, the wife of Heber the Kenite.'

**Difficulty.**—*Was not Jael's act in every way dishonourable and disgraceful; and is it not surprising to find that she is so highly praised?*

**Explanation.**—If we were called to estimate Jael's conduct upon strictly human principles, ordinary society rules of right and wrong, we should be compelled to visit it with unqualified condemnation. If we judge it by the laws of God, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' we must count her to have been a wicked woman. If we regard her act in the light of the claims of hospitality recognised in her country, we must call her conduct treacherous and disgraceful. But her act is to be judged from a special point of view. At that time God was working for the deliverance of His people, by giving certain individuals special and sudden impulses. Such an impulse came upon Jael. It was a Divine impulse in the sense of being the providential way in which Sisera's death was to be secured; but the manner in which the thing was done was Jael's own device, and for it she alone stands responsible. No Divine directions came to her as to the method in which the slaughter was to be effected. There is no difficulty in recognising the Divine hand in the death of Sisera. No difficulty in admitting that God may use a woman for effecting the death, as He used Deborah for inciting to the battle. The details of Jael's plan breathe the spirit of an age with whose violence it is impossible for us to sympathise.

The praise given to Jael is purely patriotic; it indicates the national sentiment about her act, but it in no way carries any Divine approval of her methods. Bad men and bad women may serve the Divine purposes; good men and good women may work out the Divine plan in wilful and unworthy ways. It should be understood that God overrules and uses what we should never expect Him to approve; just as, still, a country often benefits from the results of conduct, on the part of her soldiers and statesmen, of which she cannot possibly approve. Jael, following a Divine impulse, became the executor of God's judgment on Sisera. Jael did her work in a way which seems to us needlessly cruel and wicked.

This line of explanation is taken by *Dr. Waterland*: 'It can scarcely be doubted that Jael had some Divine direction or impulse

to stir her up to do what she did. The enterprise was exceedingly bold and hazardous ; and one would think that, had she been left to herself, she would have been content to let Sisera lie there, till Barak, who was then pursuing him, should come up and surprise him. The resolution she took has the marks of being from the extraordinary hand of God. In this view all is right ; and the objector will not be able to prove that there was any treachery in it. We ought to obey God rather than man ; and all obligations to man cease when brought into competition with our higher obligations towards God.'

It would be a dangerous doctrine to advance nowadays, that we were to follow all inward impulses, and recognise them as coming from God. In Jael's days, when revelation was incomplete, God did work in that method ; but now we have the written Word and the indwelling Spirit, and must not trust ourselves to the control of impulses.

*Van Lennep* notes that Jael was a Kenite, belonging to a nomadic tribe, and had wandered into Canaan. He says : 'The Arab is passionate, and under the influence of anger or hatred will sometimes break the laws of hospitality, and even trample upon the most solemnaths.'

*Capt. C. R. Conder* makes a very curious suggestion, one to which only his name could give any reasonableness or probability. 'The true reason for Jael's act is probably to be sought in Sisera's entering the tent at all. There are instances in later history in which a defeated Arab has sheltered himself in the woman's apartments, but such an infringement of Eastern etiquette has always been punished by death : and it is not impossible that in revenge for such an insult Jael seized the iron tent-peg, and drove it, with the mallet used to fix the tent to the ground, through Sisera's brain.'

*Lange's* account of this incident forcibly presents the character of the sudden impulse with which Jael was seized and carried away. Between Heber the Kenite and Jabin there was peace ; the Kenite therefore had not shared the oppression under which Israel suffered. Consequently, Sisera could hope to find in his tent a little rest from the fatigue of his long-continued exertions. Securer still as the shelter of the woman's tent. In that of Heber he might have feared the violence of Barak ; the tent of a woman no one enters with hostile purpose. He seems first to have made inquiries. She meets him with friendly mien, invites him urgently, and quiets his apprehensions. Sisera is not incautious. He proceeds to ask her for drink, pleading thirst. She gives him of her milk. It is an ancient

Oriental practice, common to all Bedouins, Arabs, and the inhabitants of deserts in general, that whoever has eaten or drunk anything in the tent is received into the peace of the house. The Arab's mortal enemy slumbers securely in the tent of his adversary, if he have drunk with him. Hence Saladin refuses to give drink to the bold Frank knight, Reinald of Chatillon, because he wishes to kill him. Sisera thinks that he may now safely yield to sleep. Only he feels that he ought first to instruct Jael how to answer any pursuers that may come. How did he deceive himself! Sisera is made to know the demon-like violence of a woman's soul, which, when it breaks loose, knows no bounds. True, Jabin is at peace with Heber. But Jael's race and its history have from time immemorial intergrown with those of Israel. Israel's freedom is her freedom; Israel's glory her glory. How many women have been dishonoured and carried away as booty by Sisera! (chap. v. 30). Shall she be idle, when the tyrant gives himself up into her hands? What if she saves him? Will it not be treason on her part against the ancient covenant with Israel? Will he not, by virtue of his vigour and skill, collect fresh troops, and threaten Israel anew? Shall it be said Jael saved the enemy of the people among whom she lived as among brothers, to their destruction? The conflict in which she finds herself is great and none but a great and powerful soul could end it as she does. She will not allow him to escape—as he will do, if she refuse to harbour him; and yet, she can harbour him only to destroy—and that not without doing violence to ancient popular custom. She makes her decision. She scorns the reward which Sisera's safety might perhaps have brought her. She takes the nobler object into consideration—the freedom of a kindred nation—and the older right preponderates. A ruthless warrior stands before her, the violator of a thousand laws of right, and all hesitation vanishes. She has no sword with which to hew the oppressor down, and seizes the terrible weapon of womanly cunning, before which no law can stand. Besides, it has been noticed, even in modern times, that in general the women of those regions care less about the rights of hospitality than the men. Burckhardt in his wanderings had personal experience of this.'

'Jael would be regarded as a patriotic heroine, whose daring had secured to Israel the fruits of their victory. The morals of that early age were not sufficiently enlightened to understand that treachery and assassination are *never* justifiable, however good may be the end in view. In ancient days no close moral analysis was applied to acts of which the general tendency was approved as right and beneficial.'

## David's Dying Instructions.

1 KINGS ii. 5-9, 26-46: 'Let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.'

**Question.**—*Can any reasonable excuse be made for the revengeful spirit manifested by David in his last hours?*

**Answer.**—Judging David from the Christian standpoint, no excuse can be found: we read the records with the utmost grief and sadness. There was nothing in the aged king of the 'mind of Christ.'

But that is not a fair standpoint from which to form our judgment. 'We must not expect Gospel morality from the saints of the Old Testament.' These last utterances are *official*, not *personal*, and as such must be estimated. David is not a private individual giving instructions to his son, but a king, an Eastern king, a theocratic king, giving instructions to his heir. It had been a part of his kingly duties to act as 'avenger' in blood-feuds. When the old tribal and Mosaic ideas of the Goël, or Blood Avenger, passed away, the public magistrate, who in early times was the king himself, took up the avenger's duty. It should be observed that David makes no mention of the killing of Absalom, because, though that act was committed in cold blood, it belonged to the time of war, and so found its excuse. The killing of Abner and Amasa were deliberate murders, and for these murders Joab's life was forfeit. It was David's public duty to avenge the slaughtered men, and clear the guilt of blood from the land.

This kingly duty, however, David had neglected. He had not dared to touch Joab. Perhaps, in view of Joab's great services, he had given him pardon for his life and reign; but as the protection of the old manslayer was limited to the life of the High Priest, so David's promise of personal safety extended only to the end of his reign. Partly because he felt he had neglected his duty, and partly because he recognised that the guilt of blood would lie on the land and call down Divine vengeance, David gave this charge to his son.

We should not have thought it strange if David had ordered Joab to be brought to *trial* for the murder of Abner and Amasa after his death, on the ground that, as a matter of clemency, the trial had been postponed during his reign. But what is recorded is precisely the same thing, only the Eastern king acts without any formal trial; he does directly what the process of law now does.

These explanations will prepare the way for the following extracts embodying the opinions of well-known Biblical writers.

*Dr. Porter* says : ' It seems to me that for a long period David was guided in his acts by worldly policy, rather than a strict sense of justice. He was more influenced by the fear of man, and a short-sighted desire to promote his own interests, than by the glory of God, and a regard for that holy law which He had revealed for the government of His people. Blood, "innocent blood," had been shed. The land was polluted by it. According to the theocratic principle, the guilt was chargeable against the land, and the punishment might at any moment be executed (see Num. xxxv. 31-33). At the close of his life, David was roused to a sense of his neglect of this imperious duty. The kingdom was in peril. Divine vengeance was impending over it. He was then too weak to carry out the law. He was at the point of death ; but, as the representative of the Divine Lawgiver and Judge, he pronounced sentence upon the criminals, and charged his heir and successor to carry it out. In this there was no "cold-blooded revenge." There was strict, though somewhat tardy, justice.'

*Prof. Ewald* writes : ' It was said that, upon his dying bed, David had recommended the successor he had already named not to let Joab's grey hair descend unscathed into the underworld, because he had taken base revenge on the two great generals, Abner and Amasa, had shed the blood of war in the midst of peace, and had stained himself over and over with the blood of the noble, "from the girdle about his loins to the latchet of the shoes upon his feet." If, however, our present customs render the very notion of such a commission offensive to us, we must recollect that in that primitive age of the monarchy, the king possessed the power of protection which had formerly belonged to the sanctuary, so that everyone whom he had promised to spare was secure of his life. But we may further remember that this right of asylum expired with the king's death, as it had formerly done at the end of the High Priest's life, and that consequently, if the king had for any reason pardoned a criminal, this personal forbearance extended only to the death of this individual king, and could in no way bind his successor. The actual undeniable guilt was regarded as still there, in spite of a sovereign's temporary lenity, so that a new king was not necessarily held to any promise of indulgence made by his predecessor ; nay, it was rather esteemed his duty at length to eradicate the uneradicated guilt, and free his royal house from the obligation of punishment.'

*Dr. Barry* says : ' The charge as to Joab has a certain righteousness in it. David could not—probably since Joab's knowledge of his great crime (in the murder of Uriah, the Hittite) he dared not—

punish him as he deserved. . . . The more recent and shameful murder of Amasa was simply one of revenge and ambition, because Amasa had been put in Joab's place ; yet David, broken in spirit, does not dare to blame it, and quietly acquiesces in the resumption by Joab of the dignity conferred on the murdered man. That these crimes should be punished by a king whose hands were clean, and who owed Joab nothing, was perhaps just, certainly within the letter of the law ; though clemency might have spared the old and now fallen warrior, who had at least served David ably with long and faithful service.'

*Prof. Rawlinson* gives the following valuable note : 'David had never formally pardoned Joab, and indeed it may be questioned whether by the law there was any power of pardoning a murderer (see Num. xxxv. 16-34 ; Deut. xix. 12). The utmost that the king could do was to neglect to enforce the law. Even in doing this he incurred a danger. Unpunished murder was a pollution to the land, and might bring a judgment upon it, like the famine which had been sent a few years before this on account of Saul and of his bloody house ; "because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Sam. xxi. 1). Or the judgment might fall upon the negligent monarch, or his house, as punishment fell on Eli and his house, for not chastising the wickedness of his sons (1 Sam. iii. 13).

'The general explanation applies also to the case of Shimei, whose sin was the public one of rebellion ; he being the head of Saul's party, and only too likely to lead another revolt as a new king was coming to the throne. His treason, for which the penalty was death, had been condoned by David, but the promise of protection naturally ceased at the king's death.'

### Gideon's Vengeance.

JUDGES viii. 16, 17 : 'And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he brake down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.'

**Question.**—*Was not the vengeance of Gideon extravagant, unreasonable, and beyond any justification from the existing conditions ?*

**Answer.**—We not unfrequently find in Holy Scripture that men have gone beyond their Divine instructions, and executed the Divine will in ways of their own devising. The Divine approbation often rests on the thing done when there can be no approbation of the manner in which the thing was done. In this way such men as Jehu are at once approved and condemned. It should also be remembered that in times of victory national excitement is raised to so

uncontrollable a pitch that even peace-loving men are carried away to approve of violent and vengeful deeds.

The execution of the open enemies of Israel may be regarded as fair by the universal laws of war ; but Gideon punished, in this extreme way, those who had only withheld succour from his fainting army, and taunted him that he was boasting before he had won his success. These men of Succoth and Penue! deserved some severe humiliation ; but Gideon's measures were extreme ones, and cannot on any principle be commended. We can but recognise the contrast between those times of wild self-assertion and these times of milder and nobler sentiments, in which we are taught that 'vengeance belongeth unto God.'

Exactly what Gideon did to these people, who showed such inhumanity and want of patriotism, it is very difficult for us to understand from the terms of the description. Possibly, as an example, the elders of these towns were scourged or threshed, with these lacerating thorn bushes ; but the wording suggests that the thorns and briers were laid over the men, and then harrows dragged them until they tore the poor victims to death.

*Archdeacon Farrar* reminds us that every man is largely influenced by the spirit of the age in which he lives, and that in the East to this day there is a far greater indifference to the value of human life than there is in Europe ; and far greater insensibility to the infliction of pain. 'It was only by slow degrees that (as we can trace in the writings of their prophets and historians) the Jews learned that deeper sense of humanity which it was certainly the object of many precepts of the Mosaic law to inspire.' 'The ruthlessness of the punishment which Gideon threatened to inflict belongs to the wild times in which he lived, and the very partial spiritual enlightenment of an imperfect dispensation. It is no more to be held up for approval or imitation than his subsequent degeneracy, while, at the same time, Gideon must, of course, be only judged by such light as he had.'

## Moses' Marriage to an Ethiopian Woman.

NUMBERS xii. 1 : 'And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married : for he had married a Cushite woman.'

**Difficulty.**—*Did not Moses break his own laws in thus marrying a foreigner ?*

**Explanation.**—If we are to understand that the wife here referred to is a second one, distinct from the daughter of Jethro, and taken by Moses during his first wife's life, he certainly broke his own laws.

and set the people a mischievously bad example. But there is no good reason for assuming that such a slur rests on Moses' character. The Cushite woman referred to is the daughter of Jethro, who, after somewhat prolonged absence, had recently been restored to him, and who excited the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron by limiting their influence with their brother.

When Moses married Jethro's daughter he was under ordinary biblical rules of marriage, and in no sense under Jewish rules, which were only revealed to him long years afterwards. Some tribes refuse to allow marriage outside the bounds of the tribe; but other tribes require the wives to be selected from related tribes. Moses had not married an *Egyptian* woman, which might have been regarded as doubtful, and likely to injure his patriotism, but a member of a desert tribe, very similar to that to which he himself belonged. So, according to the law and custom prevailing at the time, his marriage was perfectly regular.

The Authorised Version creates needless difficulty by translating in the above verse 'because of the *Ethiopian* woman.' The Revised Version corrects this by translating a Cushite woman; and we know that there was an Arabian as well as an African Cush. Jethro's tribe, dwelling in Arabia, was properly classed as Cushite.

As authorities for the above explanation the following extracts are given. *Jamieson* says: 'Arabia was called in Scripture the land of Cush, because its inhabitants were descendants of that son of Ham. The occasion of this seditious outbreak on the part of Miriam and Aaron against Moses was the great change made in the government by the seventy rulers, and also their irritating disparagement of his wife, who, in all probability, was Zipporah, and not a second wife he had recently married. Miriam and Aaron were jealous of Zipporah's relatives, through whose influence the innovation was first made.'

*Matthew Henry*, in his quaint way, says: 'Others think they quarrelled with Moses because of Zipporah, whom, on this occasion, they called in scorn an Ethiopian woman, and who, they insinuated, had too great an influence upon Moses in the choice of these seventy elders. Perhaps there was some private falling out between Zipporah and Miriam, which occasioned some hot words, and one peevish rejection introduced another, till Moses and Aaron came to be interested.'

It must be admitted, however, that while all the principal Biblical writers mention the possible identification of Zipporah, for the most part they favour the idea of a second wife, and Zipporah's death. They labour to show that the Mosaic law prohibited intermarriage

only with the Canaanites, and left the Israelites free to marry with the daughters of Moab, Cush, or Ethiopia. This will be found discussed in a paragraph on 'Solomon's Egyptian Wife.' The explanation suggested above is simple and natural, and fully meets all the requirements of the case.

### Samuel slaying Agag.

I SAMUEL xv. 33: 'And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.'

**Question.**—*How can such a terrible act as this be justified?*

**Answer.**—Effort has been made to relieve the incident of some of its horror by assuming that Samuel committed Agag to some executioner, who carried out the dreadful sentence that Samuel was commissioned to deliver. But the first impression left by the record should be preserved. Raised by the excitement of the hour to extraordinary strength, Samuel executed the Divine judgment on Agag and so carried home to Saul the conviction of his sin in failing to carry out exactly the commission entrusted to him.

Man is very willing to obey God if he may put his own limitations and qualifications upon the obedience. But such obedience can never be anything but an offence to God. Man must obey God just as God commands. Exact, unquestioning obedience is so absolutely essential as the foundation of morals and character, that even a scene like this of the killing of Agag may be necessary to get it fixed on the mind of a king, of a nation, and, through the Bible, of the world.

The form of the incident is painfully Eastern. It belongs to a sphere in which human life was imperfectly valued, and in which the sovereign rights of kings—and, therefore, much more of the King of kings—was recognised; but we may fairly regard it as the striking dramatic teaching of the all-important truth, that if man proposes to obey God, he must obey thoroughly and precisely.

Divine judgment had been given against Agag. Saul, as Jehovah's captain, was appointed agent for the execution of the Divine decrees. In mere wilfulness Saul chose to spare this condemned king. Therefore, in the most public and impressive way it must be shown that man can never successfully resist God. God's prophet shall do what God's captain had failed to do. We should carefully observe that Samuel acted officially, and in his terrible deed there is no trace of mere personal feeling or personal revenge.

The 'Speaker's Commentary' has the following note: 'Samuel thus executed the *devotion* which Saul had violated and so bot-

saved the nation from the guilt of a broken oath, and gave a final example to Saul, but apparently in vain, of uncompromising obedience to the commandments of God. There is something awful in the majesty of the prophet rising above and eclipsing that of the king.'

*Kitto*, after urging that Samuel executed Agag himself, adds: 'Samuel might deem it an honour to execute with his own hand the full judgment which had been neglected by the man to whom the sword had been entrusted. If it be urged that this act is contrary to the idea of Samuel's character which his previous history has conveyed, the answer is, that mild natures like his are often, when thoroughly roused into high excitement, capable of stronger deeds than men of habitually harsher temper.'

*Dean Stanley* says: 'The terrible vengeance exacted on the fallen king by Samuel is the measure of Saul's delinquency. The ferocious form of the offering of Agag belongs happily to an extinct dispensation. But its spirit reminds us of the famous saying of Peter the Great, when entreated in a mortal illness to secure the Divine mercy by the pardon of some criminals condemned to death: "Carry out the sentence. Heaven will be propitiated by this act of justice."'

## An Early Application of the Lex Talionis.

JUDGES i. 6: 'And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me.'

**Question.**—*Is there any ground for the opinion of Adoni-bezek, that God makes men suffer in the very way in which they have made other men suffer?*

**Answer.**—All that can be said is, that there are, undoubtedly, retributive providences; but no number of such cases can be collected sufficient to establish 'retaliation' as an ordinary method of Divine procedure. When such cases occur, and judgment takes the form of retaliation, the attention of men is arrested, and an undue importance is likely to be attached to the incidents. Men's love of the sensational even leads them to *manufacture* such cases, and force circumstances to fit the theory concerning them which they have fashioned. The great majority of God's judgments are not retributive; but He is free to choose that method if, in any case, it can serve His high moral purpose, and produce, in any given age, a healthy impression of the evil of sin.

Very few of the cases of retribution which are recorded will bear a strict and dispassionate examination. Facts are often set in the forms

and relations which will serve to support a preconceived theory, and their strictly truthful relations are kept out of sight. Science has done this great good to morals and religion : it has taught that facts must be carefully studied as facts, apart from the bias of any theories or doctrines. Only when the actual facts are known can they be set in relation to existing doctrine.

'It was an ethical maxim, extensively accepted among ancient nations, that men must suffer the same pains that they have inflicted on others. The later Greeks called this the *Neoptolemic Tisis*, from the circumstance that Neoptolemus was punished in the same way in which he had sinned. He had murdered at the altar, and at the altar he was murdered. Phaleris had roasted human beings in a brazen bull, and the same punishment was inflicted on himself.'

There was nothing novel in the punishment inflicted either by or upon Adoni-bezek. It was quite what he would expect to suffer if he were defeated and taken prisoner. *Dr. Farrar* says : 'This kind of punishment was not uncommon in ancient days. The cutting off of the thumbs would prevent a man from ever again drawing a bow, or wielding a sword. The cutting off of his great toes would deprive a man of that speed which was so essential for an ancient warrior, that "swift-footed" is, in Homer, the normal epithet of Achilles.'

Retributive punishments of this kind are not recognised in modern legislation, and Moses admitted them as a step towards the modifying of the terrible blood feuds which were characteristic of the early times and races. But it is singular to notice how the old sentiment lingers still in men's minds, so that we have great satisfaction in hearing of cases wherein Providence deals the blow to men which they have dealt to others ; or, to use the familiar expression, 'a man is hoist with his own petard.'

*F. Jacox* says : 'The early ballads of almost every literature delight in these retributive surprises. So fond is popular history of teaching this sort of philosophy by examples, that examples to the purpose are widely accepted which are yet not historical.'

### Achan's Family sharing in his Judgment.

JOSHUA vii. 25, 26 : 'And all Israel stoned him with stones ; and they burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones, unto this day.'

**Question.**—*On what principles can such sharing of the innocent with the guilty in Divine judgments be explained and justified ?*

**Answer.**—Some writers have endeavoured to relieve the narrative of its difficulty by arguing that only Achan himself and his

property were destroyed, and that his family were brought into the valley only to witness the impressive scene. *Adam Clarke* takes this view, and so does *Geikie*. Two things seem to support it: (1) The grammar of the narrative is involved, and it is difficult to distinguish precisely what was done to *him* (Achan) and to *them* (his family, or, perhaps, only his property). (2) The very distinct law laid down by Moses (Deut. xxiv. 16), 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.'

There seems to have been some difference in the mode of execution, as applied to Achan and to his family; in some way the special character of the guilt of Achan was indicated, but there is really no sufficient ground for assuming that the family was spared. Two things are decisive against that notion: (1) Phinehas, pleading with the Eastern tribes, who were supposed to have committed a trespass in building their 'witness-altar,' said: 'Did not Achan, the son of Zerah, commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.' It is clear that the point of this pleading is lost if Achan did not drag down his family with him in his destruction (Josh. xii. 20). And (2) in a most significant way the line of Carmi is topped with Achan (or Achar) in the list given in 1 Chron. ii. 7. And the historian is careful to explain how it was that Achan left no family: 'he transgressed in the thing accursed.'

Some who accept the fact that all Achan's belongings were destroyed, explain by the assumption that his family must have been privy to, and so have shared, his guilt. But this rather turns the difficulty aside than fairly meets and explains it. The narrative sets forth with very distinct prominence the fact that Achan's sin brought punishments and calamities which could not be limited to himself, which, indeed, would not have been limited to himself if only he, as the household head and the breadwinner, had been taken away: even that must have involved family disabilities—the burdens of the widow and the fatherless.

It might be sufficient to say that the sharing of families in the consequences of the sins of the heads of families was, and still is, an established sentiment and custom in the East. And the legislative, political, and social ideas of an age must be on the level of the ages. Moses found this prevailing sentiment, and the utmost he could do was to limit and qualify its operation.

But it may further be said, that in this case a special announcement and threatening had been made, and, in face of it, with

unusual daring Achan had done his daring deed. Therefore a special example was needed. Joshua treated the possession of these spoils from Jericho as bringing Achan and his family into co-partnership with the people of Jericho, and so they came under the *ban*, which involved their entire destruction.

But it is possible to treat the subject more efficiently by showing that, in such cases, terrible as they seem from modern human points of view, human law and sentence do but illustrate and conserve the natural order, the divine constitution of society, which still includes families in the material consequences of parents' sins; communities in the penalties following on the sins of society leaders; and nations in the judgments brought on by the follies and transgressions of statesmen and of kings.

Scientific and philosophical teachers are nowadays finding out for us, and showing to us, the importance, in relation to the moral education of humanity, of what they call the 'solidarity of the race, the way in which one man is linked with another in the bearing of race-burdens. But in this they are only illustrating the well-known Bible principle, that 'if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.'

The punishments of guilt would not be effective in convincing us of the real hatefulness and terribleness and corrupting influence of evil, if they were strictly limited to the wrong-doer: they would not make adequate impression on the *feeling* of the race. So God stamps the exceeding evil of sin by saying to the sinner, 'You cannot keep the consequences of your transgression to yourself: they will smite your wife; they will wound your innocent children: they will leave corrupting influences on your generation.'

So, in the case now before us, Achan suffered *penally*, and Achan's family suffered *vicariously*.

As giving authority to this explanation, the note from *Ellicott's Commentary* may be quoted:—'All were evidently destroyed together. For any other sin but this, Achan must have suffered alone. But, in this case, warning had been given that the man who took of the accursed thing, or *chêrem*, would be an accursed thing like it, if he brought it into his house (Deut. vii. 26), and would make the camp of Israel *chêrem* also (Josh. vi. 18); and thus Achan's whole establishment was destroyed, as though it had become part of Jericho. It is not necessary to assert that the family of Achan were accomplices. His cattle were not so, and yet they were destroyed. . . . The severity of the punishment must be estimated by the relation of Achan's crime to the whole plan of the conquest of Canaan. If the

destruction of the Canaanites was indeed the execution of the Divine vengeance, it must be kept entirely clear of all baser motives, lest men should say that Jehovah gave His people licence to deal with the Canaanites as it seemed best for themselves. . . . The gratification of human passions may not be mingled with the execution of the vengeance of God.'

## The Fate of the Deceived Prophet.

**I KINGS xiii. 11-32 :** 'Forasmuch as thou hast been disobedient unto the mouth of the Lord . . . thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Should not the judgment of God, in this case, have fallen rather on the deceiver than on the deceived ?*

**Explanation.**—God's lessons for men come in part through His judgments, and we may say especially through His judgments on His own people, through His ways of dealing with His own servants. They are a spectacle unto men. If we are right-hearted servants, we shall be willing for others to be taught, even through and by means of our sufferings.

Now one most essential lesson for humanity is this : God requires a strict, precise, minute, and entire obedience of His commands. When He speaks, man must do at once, exactly and without questioning, what He orders. He must be even obeyed in the precise way He directs. It is not enough for man to obey, but to choose his own times and ways. To teach this lesson God shows that He will not pass over even small failures from obedience in His trusted and honoured servants.

This is the meaning of the incident of the deceived prophet. He failed in completeness and precision of obedience, and he must be made a public monument, for the warning of that age and of all ages. Two things are clearly set forth in the narrative : (1) The prophet from Judah was commanded to reprove Jeroboam for his imperfect obedience. Jeroboam tried to think himself, and to persuade others, that he was doing Jehovah's will, but he was doing it in his own way—his own wilful way ; and that can never be acceptable. (2) The prophet had definite and distinct instructions (see verse 17), and this made disobedience without excuse. God could not pass by the prophet's failure in obedience, when that prophet was actually on a mission for the reproving of the king's failure in obedience.

Thus much seems quite clear, but the grave difficulty relates to the part taken by the old prophet of Bethel. He should be regarded as

the Providential agency for the testing of the other prophet's obedience. And this view should suffice. All virtue must come under testings. Jeroboam tested the prophet by offering him food, and the prophet withstood the test. The temptation came again in more subtle guise, through one who professed to be a fellow-prophet; and the man yielded, though he might have said, 'You speak confidently enough, but I must carry out precisely the instructions which God has given directly to me.' We may be sure that the old lying and deceiving prophet came under Divine judgments, but we are not told them, simply because the narrative is not concerned with God's judgments on *deceivers*, but with God's judgments on imperfect obedience—a much more needed and much more searching lesson.

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'If the man of God from Judah had been spared, the effect of his warning against the sin of Jeroboam would have been almost lost. He returned to Bethel; he communicated with the old man, the prophet, who dwelt there. He did this, although he had declared publicly at Bethel to Jeroboam that he was forbidden by God to eat there (verses 8, 9). Thus he made it easy for the king to say, that the man of Judah was not a person to be trusted, and that he had lied in what he had spoken against the altar; or that, if he was a man of God, communion with the dwellers at Bethel was not a thing displeasing to Him; and God's own cause was at stake.'

On the old prophet at Bethel *Wordsworth* further says: 'God dealt with the old prophet of Bethel as He had dealt of old with Balaam. This old man was a prophet; but, like Balaam the prophet, he "held the truth in unrighteousness;" he felt that the mission of the man of Judah against the altar at Bethel was tantamount to a condemnation of himself: he desired to weaken the effect of that censure; he wished to appear to be on good terms with the man of Judah; he cared little whether he involved him in ruin; he allured him back to Bethel by a profession of prophetic sanctity, and by a pretence of an angelic message; he did this, although he well knew that he was thus setting himself against the command of the Lord Himself. And he seemed almost on the point of defeating God's good purposes, and of blasting His merciful design in sending the prophet from Judah to Bethel. But at this critical point God Himself interfered. He did with this old prophet as He had done with Balaam before (Num. xxii. 5; xxiii. 5). He caught him in his own snare; he made him the instrument of declaring the prophet's sin and God's righteousness; He put a word into his mouth, which

He constrained him to utter (verses 20-22). He was a prophet who sinned against God, and sold himself to the Evil One. But God still used him as a prophet, and overruled even his sin for the triumph of His own power and for the display of His own glory.'

*Dean Stanley* says of this old prophet: 'The motives of the prophet of Bethel are so obscurely given in the sacred narrative, and so differently related by *Josephus*, as almost to defy our scrutiny. He seems to be one of those mixed characters, true to history and human nature, which perpetually appear amongst the sacred persons of the Old Testament; moved by a partial wavering inspiration; aiming after good, yet failing to attain it; full of genuine tender admiration for the prophet, of whose death he had been the unwilling cause, the mouthpiece of truths which he himself but faintly understood.'

The incident is recorded as a warning against sins of disobedience in things that seem of small importance. *Burder* recalls an illustration of similar severity in punishing in exactness in public obedience. The Athenians put their ambassadors to death on their return from Arcadia, though they had faithfully performed their business, simply because they came by another way than that which had been prescribed to them.

## Joshua's sending Spies to Jericho.

JOSHUA ii. 1: 'And Joshua, the son of Nun, sent out of Shittim two men as spies secretly, saying, Go view the land, and Jericho.'

**Difficulty.**—*Can secret and deceptive work ever be right in the sight of God?*

**Explanation.**—From the higher standpoint of Christianity, and in the line of our Lord's teaching, that our intercourse with each other should be simply 'Yea, yea,' 'Nay, nay,' we may say that private and personal acts of secrecy and deception never can be acceptable in the sight of God. And even under the earlier dispensation, schemes, subtleties, and deceptions in private life, and intercourse between man and man, never meet with Divine commendation.

But things may be necessary for the ordering of society, and for the abnormal relations of nations, which cannot be permitted in private life. The distinction between the two conditions may be thus stated. Over private and personal relationships God's rules hold control. But the conditions of society and the relations of nations

are adjusted by man, who tries, more or less sincerely and successfully, to adapt to varying conditions the rules of God. But man finds exigencies arise which seem to demand a temporary suspense of the higher laws of truth and charity, and all ages have recognised that such special exigencies are found in times of war. It is the gravest accusation that can be brought against war, that, for the conducting of it efficiently, man finds he must suspend the great moral laws.

The employment of spies and the arrangement of ambushes and stratagems can only be commended if the war undertaken be in itself righteous. War, serious evil that it is, may be used by God for His great purposes, just as He uses other evil things—plague, famine, pestilence, and the wrong-doings of men; but while He is pleased to use war, under its human conditions, we need not assume His approval of the spirit shown in it, or the things done.

It is a remarkable thing that, in the record of sending out these spies, it is made quite plain that Joshua acted according to the good judgment of the skilful general, and not by express Divine direction.

All that can be said in approval of Joshua's act is expressed by *Lange*: 'The use of human prudence, with all trust in Divine Providence, is not only allowable, but often also a binding duty. Joshua ought not, in his position as a general, to enter into a strange and hostile land without having explored it first.'

## An Evil Spirit from God.

1 SAMUEL xvi. 14, 15: 'Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.'

**Difficulty.**—*Must God be thought of as employing evil spirits?*

**Explanation.**—The ancients were not able to distinguish cases of mental disease, of mania or epilepsy, from cases of devil-possession. Their unscientific explanation of idiocy and madness is not to be accepted by us as inspired truth. Scripture gives truthfully the ideas entertained in a particular age, but Divine inspiration does not guarantee correctness in matters of medical science.

As cases of mental disease, these so-called possessions of evil spirits are to be treated in the same way as cases of bodily disease. We can quite readily receive the truth that diseases affecting the body are sent by God, and used by Him for judgment and correction; and we ought to find no difficulty in apprehending that diseases

affecting the mind are sent and used by Him in the same way. The evil spirit from God afflicting King Saul was an obscure form of mental disease, in its natural features being a result of the exaggeration of the king's self-will, and of his annoyance at his will being successfully resisted.

On the existence of evil spirits, and the senses in which they are subordinate to God, and used for the fulfilment of His purposes, a treatise might be written, and some special features of the subject will be found treated in other paragraphs. It may suffice in this case to support the view that Saul's was a case of mania or mental disease.

Some writers translate the word 'an evil or melancholy spirit.' *Matthew Henry* says: 'The devil, by the Divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul by means of the corrupt humours of his body and passions of his mind. He grew fretful and peevish and discontented, timorous and suspicious, ever and anon starting and trembling. He was sometimes, says Josephus, as if he had been choked or strangled, and a perfect demoniac by fits. This made him unfit for business, precipitate in his counsels, the contempt of his enemies, and a burden to all about him.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'Saul became melancholy, gloomy, irritable, envious, suspicious and distracted, as a man wandering about in the dark.'

*Ellicott's Commentary* says: 'It was a species of insanity, fatal alike to the poor victim of the malady and to the prosperity of the kingdom over which he ruled.'

*Jamieson* says: 'His own gloomy reflections—the consciousness that he had not acted up to the character of an Israelitish king—the loss of his throne, and the extinction of his royal house, made him jealous, irritable, vindictive, and subject to fits of morbid melancholy.'

*Kitto* says: 'The mind of this prince, not in his best fortunes strong, gradually gave way beneath the terror of these thoughts, the certainty of his doom, and the uncertain shapes in which it appeared. He sank into a deep melancholy, which being regarded as a Divine judgment, it is said that "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him."'

## Rahab's Untruthful Answer.

JOSHUA ii. 4, 5: 'And the woman took the two men, and hid them; and she said, Yea, the men came unto me, but I wist not whence they were: and it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out; whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly, for ye shall overtake them.'

**Difficulty.**—*Are we to understand that the commendation of Rahab includes approval of her deception?*

**Explanation.**—The commendation of Scripture applies wholly to the faith in God, of which her conduct was a vigorous expression, and it implies no acceptance of the particular words and deeds, which are simply recorded as historically true. A man may do a wrong thing in a right spirit; and then God will graciously accept the spirit while He must condemn the thing. And so a man may do a right thing in a wrong spirit. Then God may be pleased to use the bad man's right thing, while He condemns the bad man.

From the point of view of the king and people of Jericho, Rahab's action was traitorous. Judged by ordinary rules of morality, she was a liar and a deceiver. But from the point of view of Jehovah's supreme claims over all kings and people, her act was one of faith—wrong still in modes, and only right in its supreme aim.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 31) distinctly declares the acceptance of Rahab to have rested on the faith in God, which her actions showed. 'By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

The case of Rahab, however, opens up for consideration one of the most perplexing questions of casuistry: How far does stress of circumstances relieve moral obligations? Does personal danger remove the guilt of lying for the sake of self-preservation? Does a state of war alter the claims which one man naturally has upon his brother, and suspend, as between the parties at war, the claims of the moral law?

All nations, in all ages, answer these questions in the affirmative. Christianity, however, affirms that the state of war is wrong. Christianity refuses to loosen moral claims for any set of circumstances; and teaches that men must suffer, and men must die, in unswerving loyalty to the Yea which is Yea, and the Nay which is Nay.

But we may not judge the earlier ages of the world, when men were only gradually discovering the true magnificence of the moral law as an all-sufficient standard of conduct and relations, by the Christian

standard. As Christians we must condemn Rahab's untruthfulness. As reasonable readers of history, who understand that the moral education of the race has been carried on from small beginnings through progressive stages, we can find explanations and excuses for her, and even say that her conduct was not thought wrong when judged by the men of her time.

*W. H. Groser* says: 'Rahab's protection of the spies has been stigmatized as traitorous, and her concealment of them as a piece of lying and deceit. But as to the first, it is evident that she was convinced that the cause of Israel was that of the true God, to oppose which would have been the greater sin. And as to the deception which she practised, there is no need to defend that which is nowhere commended *in itself*. Rahab is not praised for her *falsehood*, but for her *faith*; although many Christian moralists, beside Paley, would defend deception in word and deed, when practised to save life.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* meets this difficulty in a very wise and satisfactory manner. 'Rahab was guilty of a falsehood; but here is an evidence of the truth of the history; her moral infirmity is not concealed or extenuated, although she had been received into the family of God's people, and was dwelling in Israel, when the Book of Joshua was written. Rahab had been brought up among idolaters, who have little regard for truth; and she lived in Jericho, one of the greatest cities of Canaan. It was not to be expected that, all at once, she would become a lover of truth, and would think it sinful to employ an artifice to attain a good end. Her case was like that of the Egyptian midwives, who told a falsehood to Pharaoh in order to save the lives of the male children of Israel (Exod. i. 17, 21). In both cases God was "not extreme to mark what was done amiss," but graciously accepted their acts of faith and mercy, although they were sullied and blemished by human infirmity; and thus He gently led them on to higher degrees of virtue; and with the spirit of obedience and trust, which the midwives and Rahab evinced, they would hardly fail to attain those higher degrees, when they were more fully conversant with His Law—the Law of Truth as well as of Love.'

The gist of the matter may be expressed in the following very forcible sentence:—"The Divine standard of sin and holiness never varies; but the standard of man's conscience, even when faith is a dominant principle in the character, may vary to a very considerable degree. In Jesus Christ "all that believe are justified from all things;" but "by the deeds or the law," no one.' (*Rev. C. H. Waller, M.A.*)

## Gideon's Sin in the Matter of the Ephod.

JUDGES viii. 27 : 'And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah : and all Israel went a whoring after it there ; and it became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*What was this article that Gideon made, and why was making it wrong ?*

**Answer.**—The ephod was a linen tunic, worn by the High Priest as his characteristic vestment. In later times it seems to have been worn by all the priests. But when Gideon lived it was worn by the High Priest only, and by him to hold the richly jewelled breastplate, when he inquired of God by Urim and Thummim.

Two things seems to have influenced Gideon. (1) The priests at Shiloh had shown no interest in his mission, and he felt, therefore alienated from them. (2) He had himself received direct communications from God. When he returned successful, and with a large spoil of jewels, the idea was suggested to his mind that he could now be independent of the priests, and have an ephod and breastplate of his own, by means of which he could directly appeal to God. We are to understand the ephod he made as including all the paraphernalia for inquiring of God.

The sin of Gideon was the sin of Jeroboam. He took the arrangement of the religious affairs of the nation into his own hands, and acted upon what appeared to be expedient, not in view of what was right. Both Gideon and Jeroboam had a certain measure of good intention ; but good intentions can never excuse wilfulness. 'He was reprehensible for setting up this schismatical ephod, and the sacred historian meant to attribute the fall of his house to this particular sin.'

*Dr. Farrar*, remarking on the ephod being put in Gideon's own city, Ophrah, says : 'This gives us a clue to Gideon's motive. Shiloh, the national sanctuary, was in the precincts of the fierce tribe of Ephraim, and Gideon may have been as anxious as Jeroboam afterwards was to keep some direct hold on the nation's worship, as one of the secrets of political power. It was the endeavour to secure and perpetuate by unworthy political expedients a power which he had received by Divine appointment.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* draws out the lesson of the incident in this way : 'Gideon's history is a warning that it requires more than a *good intention* to make a *good act* ; and that the examples of the best of men are not a safe guide of conduct, and the better the man is, the worse will be the consequences of bad acts done by him.'

*Bishop Hall* remarks : 'Gideon meant well by his rich ephod, yet this act set all Israel a-whoring. God had chosen a place and service of His own : and when the wit of man will be over-pleasing God with better devices than His own, it ends in mischief.'

## David's Deception of the Philistines.

1 SAMUEL xxvii. 11, 12 : 'And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring them to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so hath been his manner all the while he hath dwelt in the country of the Philistines. And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him ; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.'

**Question.**—*Can we be required to approve of David's action towards Achish ?*

**Answer.**—No, we are not. It properly arouses our indignation, and calls for our reprobation. We may find some explanations of his conduct, when it is judged from a purely prudential point of view ; but we can find no excuses for it. It was wrong as deception. It was wrong as the self-willed shaping of his own circumstances. It was wrong as an utter failing from trust in God. But the first verse of the chapter clearly informs us that it was a time of hopelessness and despair with David—really a time of backsliding ; and we have the record preserved for us of the sad mistake he fell into, and the shame he brought upon the name of religion, when thus for a while he 'followed the devices and desires of his own heart.' These are not the actions of David the pious, but of David the apostate, and they cannot in any sense be fairly charged upon his religion, or made into a charge upon religion in general. They are recorded as warnings of the peril to which the good man is exposed if, even in a time of despondency, he lets self-will get the mastery.

*Canon Spence* says : 'This year and four months spent with Achish were among the darkest days of David's life. He was sorely tried, it is true ; but he had adopted the very course his bitterest foes would have wished him to select. In open arms, apparently leagued with the deadliest foes of Israel ; like an Italian condottiere, or captain of free lances in the middle ages, he had taken service and accepted the wages of that very Philistine city whose champion he once had slain in the morning of his career. At last his enemies at the court of Saul had reason when they spoke of him as a traitor. From the curt recital in this chapter, which deals with the saddest portion of David's career, we shall see that while he apparently continued to make common cause with the enemies of his race, he still used his power to help, and not to injure, his countrymen ; but the price he

paid for his patriotism was a life of falsehood, stained, too, with deeds of fierce cruelty, shocking even in those rough, half-barbarous times.'

Referring to David's wholesale slaughters at this time, *Canon Spence* asks: 'Was it not these acts of ruthless cruelty which left on this king's hands the stain of blood which rendered them unfit in after-days to build the House of the Lord he longed so passionately to erect?'

*Dr. Geikie* says: 'That one who could compose such psalms as his should be capable of habitual deception, and unrestrained slaughter, even of women and children, only illustrates the low moral standard of the age, and the strange contradictions of human nature. Spiritual development such as his, in an age so rude, crafty, and bloodthirsty, is in itself a miracle of which the only explanation is that he owed it to Divine inspiration.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'The sacred historian does not disguise from the reader, that David resorted to unworthy shifts and prevarications, and to acts, it may be, of cruelty. Such were the results of his want of trust in the Divine providence, and failure to rely upon God.'

## The Slaughter of the Baal Worshippers.

2 KINGS x. 18-28; comp. xi. 17, 18: 'Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth.'

**Question.**—*Are we required to approve of the methods in which men carry out the Divine judgments? Must we think of God as pleased with Jehu's treachery?*

**Answer.**—God always deals with men as free agents, who can put quality and character into the things which they are commanded to do. When He employs material forces to execute His judgments, disease, famine, tempest, earthquake, etc., He keeps the entire control of them in His own hands. Such things can manifest no individuality, and so no moral quality. When God employs man, in ways of war or judicial punishment, He leaves them in a measure free to devise methods, and to manifest personal character and motive in their methods. If this be fairly apprehended, it will become clear that, in many cases, God can approve, and even reward, a man for the *thing done*, when He must disapprove, and even punish a man for, the spirit and manner in which he has done it. This consideration enables us to limit the Divine approval to the execution of the Divine judgment on the foreign Baalites, who had alienated Jehovah's people from their allegiance; and at the same time to explain why

God judged Jehu, and his posterity for the self-seeking, the treachery, and the undue violence with which he did Jehovah's work. He was praised for his zeal, but not for his subtlety.

In excuse for Jehu, all that can be urged is, that such terrible destructions are characteristic of Eastern lands at times when reigning dynasties are changed. His dreadful massacre of the Baal-worshippers can be paralleled by the slaughter of the Janissaries, and other terrible tragedies in the modern history of the East.

*Dean Stanley* writes: 'The character of Jehu is not difficult to understand, if we take it as a whole, and consider the general impression left upon us by the Biblical account. He is exactly one of those men whom we are compelled to recognise, not for what is good or great in themselves, but as instruments for destroying evil and preparing the way for good; such as Augustus Cæsar at Rome, Sultan Mahmoud II. in Turkey, or one closer at hand in the revolutions of our own time and neighbourhood. A destiny, long kept in view by himself or others—inscrutable secrecy and reserve in carrying out his plans—a union of cold remorseless tenacity with occasional bursts of furious, wayward, almost fanatical, zeal; this is Jehu, as he is set before us in the historical narrative, the worst type of a son of Jacob—the "Supplanter," as he is called, without the noble and princely qualities of Israel—the most unlovely and the most coldly commended of all the heroes of his country' (Hosea i. 4).

The following estimate of Jehu's act is given by *Prof. Rawlinson*:—'Objectively considered, the slaughter of the servants of Baal was in perfect harmony with the law; but, subjectively, the motive which influenced Jehu was thoroughly selfish. The priests and prophets of Baal in Israel, as depending entirely on the dynasty of Ahab, the king who had originally introduced the Baal-worship, might prove dangerous to Jehu. By exterminating them he might hope to secure the whole-hearted allegiance of the party that stood by the legitimate worship. His maintenance of the *cultus* established by Jeroboam (verse 29) proves that he acted from policy rather than religious zeal.'

### The Lawfulness of Laying Ambush.

JOSHUA viii. 2: 'Set thee an ambush for the city behind it' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Why did God in this case order Joshua to adopt measures of human expediency? Could He not have given success to the army in open fight?*

**Explanation.**—Joshua had to deal with a people who were disheartened and even demoralized. A second straightforward attack

on Ai would have made too great a demand on the faith and obedience of the army. As a matter of mere human prudence it was better to try another method, and one which divided the host, occupied the attention of the soldiers, demanding secrecy, endurance, and promptitude.

Stratagem and ambush, however, belong to comparatively uncivilized times and methods of warfare. Common sentiment now regards them as dishonourable, and, except in cases of uttermost necessity, no general would now take unfair deceptive advantage of his enemy. We may only say that ambush was a lawful method of warfare in the times of Joshua; it suited the Eastern character; it belonged to the guilefulness of the Israelite race, and the requirements and permissions of the God and King of Israel could reasonably be on the level of the public sentiment.

Whether 'ambush' is lawful in any given case must be decided by the circumstances of the case. War is an unnatural relation for brethren of the one human family to be in; and it is safer to treat everything connected with it as abnormal. We can never discover what is right or what is wrong for our ordinary and proper human associations by the study of things done in war-times. The whole thing cometh of evil, and is stained through and through with evil.

We can only say that God enters into existing human conditions, low and base though they may be, in order that He may overrule them to the accomplishment of His high and gracious moral ends in the final well-being of the race.

Reverting to the narrative, the practical wisdom of the ambush may be clearly shown. It seems that the town of Bethel was sufficiently near to render aid to Ai. It was in the rear, less than two miles off, and was at least a shelter to which the men of Ai might fly if they were defeated. As a matter, therefore, of military prudence, it was necessary to mask Bethel, and this was done by sending men round about to secure the valley between the two towns. Then, Bethel being secured, the men of Ai could be drawn forth by one party and their retreat cut off by another. Except for the scheme to deceive the soldiers of Ai by seeming to flee before them, Joshua's plan may be regarded as a display of military science, and not as a mere stratagem.

There is some confusion in the numbers of the soldiers who were employed in carrying out Joshua's scheme, but a very simple explanation removes all difficulty. Thirty thousand was the number selected by Joshua for the enterprise. These were sent away from the camp

to make a night march towards Ai: five thousand of these were specially charged to go round the west side of Ai, between that city and Bethel; while the rest took up position on the north of the city. All was ready when the morning came; the five thousand behind the city were not discovered, and the King of Ai naturally thought that the large host in front of him was the only army with which he had to deal. Joshua evidently took a position on the hills, from whence his signal of the uplifted spear could be observed by the sentinels of the five thousand.

## God's Influence on Heathen Peoples.

JOSHUA xi. 20: 'For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, to come against Israel to battle, that he might utterly destroy them, that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses.'

**Question.**—*Is this to be regarded as a statement of facts, or an expression of the opinion of the writer? If it represents facts, does it not remove the guilt of these kings?*

**Answer.**—If we found such a statement in any ordinary book of history, we should have no difficulty in recognising in it the attempted explanation of the writer of the history. The verse is evidently inserted as a note; and we have first to see how far such an opinion fits into the prevailing sentiments of the age, and then how far it finds expression for those deeper relations of God to human actions and affairs which should be recognised in all ages.

It seems to have been a peculiarity of the Hebrew mind to regard God as *doing* what we think of God as *permitting*. We can distinguish between God's *ruling* and *overruling*, between God's *acting* and *controlling other men's acting*. But these distinctions were too subtle for the Hebrew mind. The Israelites had to preserve the truths of God's unity, of His absolute control over all things and all beings, of His omniscience, omnipresence, and supreme authority; and in their efforts to preserve these truths, they stated, without due qualifications, the Divine relations with self-willed nations and kings.

In the passage now before us, we should simply see an Eastern and Hebrew form of expressing the fact of God's overruling even the wilfulness of men; but under its figures we may find the permanent fact of the Divine dealing with individuals and communities. His judgments may take effect on the *minds* as well as on the bodies or circumstances of men. When they take effect on mind and will and judgment, exerting a blinding, bewildering, or hardening influence, actual calamities follow as the natural result. Too often men only

recognise the calamities, and they fail to see that the Divine judgment came first on the mind, the will, or the heart.

It is interesting to observe that the explanation now given has been found so universally acceptable that it has been embodied in a proverb, '*Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat*'—'Whom God would destroy He first dement.' And clearing away some of the difficulty of God's 'hardening hearts,' Moses says of Sihon, King of Heshbon, 'The Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate.' The similar expressions used of the Egyptian Pharaoh are explained in other paragraphs.

The passage on which we are now commenting does not assert the guilt of these kings in attacking Israel. Their sin was quite distinct from their relations with Israel. It concerned the corruptions, idolatries, and violences of their past lives, and their coming against Israel and being destroyed is all summed up as belonging to their *judgment*, and not to their *guilt*. First delusion, then masterful self-will, and then overwhelming calamity; but delusion as well as destruction a direct Divine judgment.

It may be added that the word translated 'harden' would be more correctly rendered 'strengthen' (LXX. κατισχυσαι).

There is a good note in *Lange*: 'That their ruin serves to glorify God is self-evident; only the matter should not be so understood as it is by Calvin, who, while not denying indeed the guilt of the Canaanites, still leaves in the background the *judicial* providence of God revealing itself in their hardness of heart, and speaks only of God's having made a way for his *decree* by 'hardening the ungodly.'

## The Mistake of keeping Mistaken Vows.

1 SAMUEL xiv. 24, 44, 45: 'And the men of Israel were distressed that day; but Saul adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until it be evening, and I be avenged on mine enemies.' 'And Saul said, God do so and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan. And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Difficulty.**—*To what extent may altered circumstances, or increased knowledge, be allowed to influence the keeping of our vows or the fulfilment of our promises?*

**Explanation.**—Eastern people made much more of vows and solemn pledges than we do. In this age of writing, all promises and agreements are properly drawn out, signed, and witnessed. They are, therefore, made quietly and calmly, and upon all due consideration,

and the precise fulfilment of them can therefore be rightly and legally enforced.

But in ancient times and Eastern lands documentary pledges were unusual, and vows publicly uttered and heard by witnesses took their place. It was therefore most important that a public sentiment concerning the irrefragible character of such vows should be established, more especially if they were uttered by persons in authority. But there was always the danger of such vows being made hastily, upon insufficient or incorrect information, without due consideration, or upon an impulse of good feeling which had no adequate support from good judgment.

Still, the importance of maintaining the sentiment that a vow made would certainly be fulfilled, led kings and leaders to keep promises which circumstances proved to have been unwisely made. In such cases we must judge of their action in the light of its influence upon their age; but the higher Christian light makes quite clear our duty in relation to promises made upon imperfect knowledge or inadequate representations. All such promises may be broken, and they may be better broken than kept. The case is unquestionable, if the fulfilment of the promise will do some positive wrong, or be contrary to the spirit of righteousness and charity which should rule in Christian hearts.

From the Christian standpoint there is no hesitation in saying that Jephthah should have broken his vow, and before God was wrong in fulfilling it. And there is even less hesitation in saying that Herod was condemned before God for keeping a vow made under sensual excitements, which brought round the peril of one of God's faithful servants. Darius was right in breaking the vow, or law, of the Medes and Persians respecting Daniel, when God so plainly showed how rash and how malicious the securing of that law had been.

The case now before us is recorded to show that vows made in a rash and self-willed spirit are not binding. It is quite plain, on the face of the narrative, that Saul had not sufficient information, that he acted rashly, and in a self-willed spirit: and it was most unreasonable that the national triumph should be checked, and the national hero sacrificed, because Saul spake unadvisedly with his lips. If the consequences could have fallen entirely on Saul, who made the vow, it might have been well for him thus to learn humility and prudence; but the people were right in demanding the humiliation of the king as the utterer of a foolish vow, rather than the sacrifice of the king's son by the keeping of a rash and wicked pledge.

Vows calmly made upon due consideration ought to be as binding

as legally attested deeds. But promises made hurriedly, or upon deceptive or insufficient information, cannot be absolutely binding. A man is always at liberty to withdraw a promise which has been unfairly or hurriedly obtained.

*Dante* has the following lines in 'Paradise,' v. 63-68.

'Take, then, no vow at random ; ta'en in faith,  
Reserve it ; yet not bent, as Jephthah once,  
Blindly to execute a rash resolve.  
Whom better it had suited to exclaim,  
"I have done ill," than to redeem his pledge  
By doing worse.'

## Human Sacrifices.

GENESIS xxii. 2 : 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.'

**Difficulty.**—*Can God be conceived of as desiring the sacrifice of human life ?*

**Explanation.**—It is specially stated that what God did on this occasion was done for the precise purpose of tempting or testing the Patriarch : and it may well have been that God required an act which Abraham felt was unlike Him, and unworthy of the thoughts he had hitherto cherished concerning Him. His faith and obedience were therefore tested by the very fact that he could not see the rightness of what he was required to do. In the ordinary scenes of home and business we should see nothing wrong in a parent or a master giving a command which he did not mean to enforce, but designed only to be a means of testing the spirit of a child or a servant. A simple illustration may be found in the Christian master who required his apprentice to come to work on the Sunday. That command seemed to the Christian apprentice most unworthy of his Christian master. But it effectively tested whether that youth would serve God rather than man when man's commands conflicted with God's. No one would say that such a master committed a moral wrong by thus making himself out to wish what he did not really wish, for the sake of testing the youth. And so, we need not think of God as intimating any desire for human sacrifices because He tried our father Abraham's obedient trustfulness by making a strange request.

But it should further be noticed that human sacrifices are altogether unfamiliar, and even utterly revolting to us, although they were familiar enough to Abraham. Our increased knowledge of Bible lands and times has brought us proofs of the prevalence of the custom in

very various countries, some of them countries with which Abraham must have been acquainted.

*Knobel* says that 'human sacrifices, especially of children, were customary among the pre-Hebraic nations of Palestine, among the kindred Phœnicians, among their descendants, the Carthaginians, among the Egyptians, among the tribes related with Israel, the Moabites and Ammonites, who honoured Moloch with them. They appear also in the Aramaic and Arabian tribes, but were forbidden by the Jewish law.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* shows that the old Accadians, or early Turanian inhabitants of Chaldæa, the region from which Abraham came, had adopted the practice of human sacrifice long before Abraham's time. He gives the following old Accadian inscription :—'In the month Sivan, from the first day to the thirtieth, an eclipse failed, (and) the crops of the land were not prosperous. When the God of the Air (atmosphere) is fine, (then there is) prosperity. On the high places the son is burnt.'

Nothing better can be said on this incident than the following sentences of *F. W. Robertson* : 'Abraham lived in a country where human sacrifices were common ; he lived in a day when a father's power over a son's life was absolute. He was familiar with the idea ; and just as familiarity with *slavery* makes it seem less horrible, so familiarity with this as an established and conscientious mode of worshipping God removed from Abraham much of the horror that *we* should feel.'

### Limitation of Judgment to the Sinner.

DEUTERONOMY xxiv. 16 : 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers ; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.'

**Difficulty.**—*How can this be reconciled with such cases as those of Korah and Achan, where the families appear to have been executed with the guilty fathers ?*

**Explanation.**—This passage is a part of the rules given to judges and magistrates for the ordering of their decisions and sentences. As magistrates can only deal with crimes so far as they are brought home to the criminals by adequate testimony, and as magistrates must never act upon suppositions and assumptions, and have nothing to do with motives, their sentences must concern the individual criminal alone. A magistrate has nothing to do with the family connections of a prisoner. He is not a judge to deal with families ; his work is absolutely restricted to the individual.

But God, the Supreme Ruler, is concerned with families, with men set in association as citizens of one city, or members of one tribe or nation. God can do what no man may do or can do. He can punish the individual for individual transgression; the family for family sins committed in its name by its head; and the whole city, tribe, or nation for iniquities done by its officials and representatives and leading people. Family judgments may affect the family for generations, as did the judgment on Eli's house. National judgments may fall on successive generations of the race.

The distinction, then, is this: Man has no right to include in his judgments anyone but the criminal himself. God, dealing with kinds of sin and relations of sin which are beyond men's apprehension, can give sentence upon families, generations, and nations. 'Though God, the sovereign Lord of life, sometimes visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, especially when the sin is idolatry, and when He deals with nations in their national capacity, yet He does not allow men to do so.'

This direction to the Hebrew judges was the more necessary, because amongst other Oriental nations the family of a criminal was commonly involved in his punishment, as we see in the case of Haman (Esther ix. 13, 14), and in the case of Daniel's accusers (Dan. vi. 24).

## Jeremiah's Cursings.

JEREMIAH xx. 14, 15: 'Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.'

**Difficulty.**—*Is it possible to regard such intense expressions as these as uttered sincerely; and, if sincere, could any man be justified in cherishing such feelings?*

**Explanation.**—They were sincere to the particular mood of feeling; but the mood of feeling was a wrong and a bad one. It represents what has been wisely called 'a passionate outbreak of human infirmity.' With this passage may be compared the answering passages in Job iii. 3; x. 18. *Keil* thinks that 'Job's words are more violent and passionate, and more directly directed against God than Jeremiah's.'

It is evident that verses 14-18 are so different in tone and character to the passage preceding them, that they must be regarded as forming a distinct fragment belonging to the same period, and placed in its present position by Jeremiah himself, or by the first editor of his prophecies. *Ewald* suggested that their more natural place is be-

tween verses 6 and 7. *Grotius* thinks the language may be that of Pashur, against whom Jeremiah had uttered a severe denunciation. *Umbreit* thinks the verses are merely inserted here by the prophet as a mirror in which we behold the image of his deeply wounded spirit, previous to his obtaining the deliverance from the Lord, which he had just celebrated. *Henderson* remarks that similar utterances of strong feelings of grief, in which the day of one's birth is execrated, are so common in the East, that we may well allow the originality of the prophet's language.

*Thomson*, in '*Land and Book*,' gives a very common-sense explanation of such extravagant cursings. Referring to the cursing of Gilboa by David, because Saul and Jonathan had perished on it, he says : 'David's poetical imprecation had no more influence upon the mountain, or on the clouds, than had Job's malediction upon the day of his birth ; nor was either expected to produce any such malign effects. Similar expressions of profound sorrow or of deep displeasure are common in the East, and are found elsewhere in the Bible. The *thought* is natural, and who is there that has not indulged it ? The *child* vents its displeasure upon its rattle ; the *boy* strikes the stone against which he stumbles ; the *man* curses adverse winds, and every senseless thing that annoys him, resists his will, or thwarts his plans.'

We have here a true expression of Jeremiah's mental condition ; but of his state of mind there is no indication of the Divine approval. For a while he fluctuated between trust in God and despair. To be in such a state of mental conflict was not in itself wrong : wrong would come if the prophet had given way to the despair. We should always carefully distinguish between 'doubting' and 'giving way to doubting.'

*Calvin*, however, 'condemns the prophet for using such words, and says he was guilty of serious sin and contumely against God in thus cursing the day of his birth ; but so far excuses him that it was not for worldly trouble, such as that which raised Job's anger, but because the Word of God was set at nought.'

The '*Speaker's Commentary*' adds : 'Yet the form of the expression is fierce and indignant. Possibly Jeremiah did imagine that he had neither met with that outward respect, nor with that measure of success, and even of acceptance with God, which had encouraged other prophets. No miracle had ever given proof of his authority to speak in Jehovah's name ; no prediction had as yet been verified. Such thoughts were wrong and sinful, and the impatience of Jeremiah is that part of his character which is most open to blame. Though

we admire him as a man who, in spite of opposition from without, and the despondency of his own natural disposition, always did his duty, yet he attains not to the level of the teaching of the New Testament. Still less does he reach to that elevation which is set before us by Him Who is the perfect pattern of all righteousness. Our Lord was a prophet Whose mission to the men of His generation equally failed, and His sorrow was even more deep. But it broke forth in no imprecations. "Jesus beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day" (Luke xix. 41, 42).'

*Dean Plumptre* says: 'The question whether we are to blame or palliate such utterances, how far they harmonize with Christian feeling, is one on which we need not dwell long. It is enough to note (1) that while we cannot make for them the half-evasive apology which sees in Jeremiah's prayers against his enemies, and in the imprecatory psalms, prophecies rather than prayers, they indicate the same temper as those psalms and prayers indicate when taken in their natural sense, and so help us to understand them; and (2) that in such cases, while we give thanks that we have the blessing of a higher law, and the example of a higher life, we are not called upon to apportion praise or blame. It is enough to reverence, to sympathize, to be silent.'

### Saul's Over-Anxious Haste.

1 SAMUEL xiii. 8, 9: 'And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither the burnt offering to me, and the peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.'

**Question.**—*Do not the exigencies of the occasion fairly excuse this self-willed act of Saul's?*

**Answer.**—No exigencies can excuse determined disobedience to recognised authority; but every act should be judged in the light of its surrounding circumstances, and in view of the character which such an act serves to reveal. It may be suspected that a man is wilful, unrestrained, and really self-seeking, but it may be years before he does anything which shows up his bad character, and gives us no doubt of his untrustworthiness; and the revealing act may be a very small and simple matter—a 'straw,' which nevertheless suffices to show 'in which way the wind blows.' Samuel had his fears about Saul, who was disposed to over-estimate his office as king, and tried to get free of the obligations and limitations properly belonging to him as only the prince or vicegerent of Jehovah, the true King of

Israel. But Samuel could say nothing and do nothing until Saul, by some overt acts, plainly showed his masterful spirit.

The position in which Saul was placed was certainly a very trying one. 'The panic which pervaded all Israel was every hour thinning the host Saul had gathered round him at Gilgal. The martial king longed for a chance of joining battle; and this he was forbidden to do until the seer had offered sacrifice and publicly inquired of the Lord; and the day passed by, and Samuel came not. An attack on the part of the Philistine army, encamped at no great distance, seemed imminent, and Saul's forces were rapidly melting away.' There is no occasion for assuming that the king claimed the rights and did the duties of the priests himself. A king is often said to do what his servants do in his name and at his command; but of such acts he bears the full responsibility.

*Canon Spence* gives the following valuable note in '*Ellicott's Commentary*':—'On this memorable occasion the king plainly told Samuel that, though he would gratefully receive any help which the prophet of the Most High could and would bring him, still, in an emergency like the present, sooner than run any risk, he preferred to act alone, and, if necessary, to go into battle without Divine consecration and blessing. The danger at this juncture was imminent; to ward it off, he considered that the direct Divine intimation which he allowed he had received through Samuel must be disregarded. Acting upon this persuasion, he set it aside, acting according to the ordinary dictates of worldly prudence. He must, in his action at Gilgal, either have forgotten or disbelieved the story of the Joshua conquest, and of the single deliverances under the hero Judges, when the Glorious Arm fought by the people, and splendid successes were won in the face of enormous odds through the intervention of no mortal aid. Saul might have been, and was, a valiant and skilful general, but was no fitting viceroy of the invisible King in heaven, Who required from him before all things the most ardent, unquestioning faith. Saul and his house, it is too clear, would only rule the Israel of God according to the dictates of their own haughty will.'

*Dean Stanley* skilfully brings out the precise point of Saul's failure on this occasion, and shows how this act became a revelation of his character:—'Of all the checks on the dangers incident to the growth of an Oriental monarchy in the Jewish nation, the most prominent was that which Providence supplied in the contemporaneous growth of the prophetic office. But it was just this far-reaching vision of the past and future which Saul was unable to understand. At the very outset of his career Samuel, the great representative of the pro-

phetical order, had warned him not to enter on his kingly duties till the prophet should appear to inaugurate them, and to instruct him in them. It would seem to have been almost immediately after his first call that the occasion arose. The war with the Philistines was impending. He could not restrain the vehemence of his religious emotions. As king, he had the right to sacrifice. Without a sacrifice it seemed to him impossible to advance to battle. He sacrificed, and by that ritual zeal defied the warning of the prophetic monitor. It was the crisis of his trial. He had shown that he could not understand the distinction between moral and ceremonial duty, on which the greatness of his people depended. It was not because he sacrificed, but because he thought sacrifice greater than obedience, that the curse descended upon him.\*

### Putting away Strange Wives.

**EZRA x. 17:** 'And they made an end with all the men that had married strange women by the first day of the first month.'

**Question.**—*Was not the removal of so many women and children to want, struggle, and misery, a far greater evil than retaining them in contradiction to the spirit of Mosaic regulations?*

**Answer.**—We must always carefully distinguish between an exact and truthful account of events that have happened and the Divine approval of the things that have been done. Very serious difficulties are created by the too generally approved sentiment, that if a thing is recorded in Scripture we are to understand that it, and its doers, were acceptable to God. The sentiment needs only to be thus plainly stated, and its incorrectness and unworthiness are at once revealed. Scripture is inspired as a truthful record; we must study its content in the light of its declared principles, and we must compare scriptural with scripture, if we would form a right judgment of the moral quality of actions done.

No doubt Ezra acted according to his light, and in view of what he understood God's law to require. But if we judge his action in our larger light, we cannot fail to see that he tried to remove a con-

\* A peculiarity in the arrangements made for going to war in ancient times helps further to explain the pressure put upon Saul. There was no standing army in those days, but each tribe furnished a contingent of soldiers; these were men taken from their daily work for a limited time, and each man furnished himself with the necessary food for his few days' absence from home. When his time expired, and his food was exhausted, he would feel at liberty to return home. It is said that the people 'followed Saul trembling,' and that he saw they were 'getting scattered from him.' Putting these expressions together, we may assume that the delay in joining battle was causing so many desertions that the soldiers left were trembling at the prospect of war under such disadvantageous conditions.

atively small wrong, by doing a much greater wrong. The law relating to the marriage of strange wives was a doubtful one; its precise application cannot be assured; it had for many long years been practically annulled, and its revival at this particular time was needless cruelty to the many women who had been brought into matrimonial bonds without any knowledge of wrong-doing. If anybody was punished, Ezra should have punished the *men*, not the poor women and children. It is very significant that no prophet-voice brought the command of God to put away the wives, and the narrative contains no indication whatever of the Divine pleasure in the act. It was done as an outburst of pious zeal, but it was zeal without knowledge and without wisdom.

The '*Speaker's Commentary*' admits that, 'according to the letter of the law, marriage with the Canaanite nations was alone forbidden; but it came to be generally felt that the principle of the prohibition extended to all neighbouring idolaters.' We must not, however, thus readily confound what 'people felt' with what 'God required and commanded.'

Dean Stanley gives such an estimate of Ezra and Nehemiah as reformers as enables us to estimate correctly the value of such a scheme as this of putting away the foreign wives, permitting us to class it among acts of fanaticism rather than of faith. 'Ezra and Nehemiah (for in some respects they are inseparable) are the very impersonations of that quality which Goethe described as the characteristic by which their race has maintained its place before the judgment-seat of God and of history—the impenetrable toughness and persistency which constitute their real strength as the reformers of their people. Reformers in the noblest sense of that word they were not. There is not, as in the first or second Isaiah, as in Jeremiah or Ezekiel, a far-reaching grasp of the future, or a penetration into the eternal principles of the human heart. They moved within a narrow, rigid sphere. They aimed at limited objects. They were the parents of the various divisions which henceforth divided Palestine into parties and sects. They were—by the same paradox according to which it is truly said that the Royalist Prelates of the English Restoration originated Nonconformity—the parents of the Samaritan secession. They inaugurated in their covenants and their curses that fierce exclusiveness which in the later years burned with a 'zeal not according to knowledge' in the hearts of those wild assassins who bound themselves together with a curse not to eat bread or drink water till they had slain the greatest of their countrymen (Acts xxiii. 21)—of those zealots who fought with desperate tenacity with each other and with their

foes in defence of the walls which Nehemiah had raised. But within that narrow sphere Ezra and Nehemiah were the models of good reformers. They set before themselves special tasks to accomplish and special evils to remedy, and in the doing of this they allowed no secondary or subsidiary object to turn them aside. They asked of their countrymen to undertake no burdens, no sacrifices, which they did not themselves share. They filled the people with a new enthusiasm, because they made it clear that they felt it themselves.'

Dean Stanley's judgment of the instance of overdone zeal which we are now considering is so full and so wise that we cannot withhold it, especially as we find so few other Bible writers deal fairly with the difficulties which the narrative suggests. Ezra 'was a scribe first and a priest afterwards. The Temple was an object of his veneration. But it was nothing compared to the "Law." And the vehemence of his attachment to it is the more strongly brought out by the comparatively trivial, and in some respects questionable occasion that called it forth. It was the controversy which, from this time forward, was to agitate in various forms the Jewish community till its religious life was broken asunder—its relation to the heathen population around. It may be that at that time the larger nobler, freer views which belonged to the earlier and also to the later portion of the Jewish history were impossible. There had not been the faintest murmur audible when the ancestors of David once and again married into a Moabite family, nor when David took among his wives a daughter of Geshur; nor is there a more exuberant Psalm than that which celebrates the union of an Israelite king with an Egyptian or Tyrian princess. Even if the patriarchal alliance of Abraham with the Egyptian Hagar or the Arabian Keturah, or the marriage of Moses with the Midianite or the Ethiopian, provoked a passing censure, it was instantly and strongly repelled by the loftier tone of the sacred narrative. Nor is there in the New Testament a passage more redolent of acknowledged wisdom and charity than that in which the Rabbi of Tarsus tolerates the union of the heathen husband and the believing wife. Nor are there more critical incidents in Christian history than those which record the consequences which flowed from the union of Clovis with Clotilda, or of Ethelbert with Bertha. But it was the peculiarity of the age through which the religion of Israel was now passing, that to the more keenly strung susceptibilities of the nation every approach to the external world was felt as a shock and pollution. The large freedom of Isaiah . . . was gone; the charity of Paul, and of a Greater than Paul, had not arisen. The energy of Deborah and of Elijah remained;

t for the present generation it was destined to fight, not against a  
iel oppressor or an immoral worship, but against the sanctities of  
mestic union with their neighbour tribes—dangerous, possibly, in  
eir consequences, but innocent in themselves. We are called upon  
bestow an admiration, genuine but limited, on a zeal which reminds  
of Dunstan and Hildebrand, rather than of the Primitive or the  
forming Church.

‘All these had taken strange wives, and some of them had wives  
whom they had children.’ With these dry words Ezra winds up  
e narrative of the signal victory which he had attained over the  
atural affections of the whole community—a victory doubtless which  
ad its share in keeping alive the spirit of exclusive patriotism and  
uncompromising zeal that was to play at times so brilliant and at  
nes so dark a part in the coming period of Jewish history, but  
nich, in its total absence of human tenderness, presents a dismal  
ontrast to that pathetic passage of the primitive records of their  
ce, which tells us how, when their first father drove out the foreign  
andmaid with her son into the desert, it ‘was very grievous in his  
ght,’ and ‘he rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a  
ater-skin, putting it on her shoulder, and the child;’ and how ‘God  
eard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar out  
f heaven.’

*Kitto* says: ‘There is no question that such a wholesale divorce  
roughout the land is repugnant to our notions, and appears to us  
wfully, if not needlessly, severe. We are not bound to consider  
iat because this was done by Ezra it was absolutely right. There  
ay have been something in it of that overstraining of the law to  
hich the Jews, after the captivity, became prone; and it may be  
at this example, under the authority of a personage so deservedly  
enerable as Ezra, tended to furnish a precedent for that readiness in  
ivorcing their wives, for which the Jews were, in our Lord’s time,  
otorious. It is clear to us that Moses meant only to interdict inter-  
narrriages with the devoted nations of Canaan; and, in extending the  
nterdiction to *all* foreigners, a step was taken towards that rigorous  
nterpretation of the law which began from this time to prevail, and  
hich can only be explained by the aversion and profound dread  
with which idolatry was regarded by the Jewish people after the  
captivity.

## The Law of the Divine Mercy.

1 KINGS xxi. 29 : 'And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days ; but in his son's days I will bring the evil upon his house.' (See another paragraph on this passage, dealing with the transference of Ahab's judgment to his descendants, p. 80.)

**Question.**—*Is the Divine mercy to be regarded as dependent on the moral condition of individuals?*

**Answer.**—Ahab, as the King of Israel, represented the rebellion of the nation against Jehovah, the true King of Israel ; and the rebellion brought from Jehovah a call to national repentance, and threatening of national judgments if the people did not repent. If the doubt might arise, whether God would be merciful if the nation *did* change its mind, and return from its idolatrous and wicked ways. How, in those days, could such a doubt be met better than by setting before the people a prominent case as a specimen and illustration. Let the case be that of the chief person in the realm. Let everybody see how God will deal with Ahab. He sinned grievously in the matter of Naboth. Special threatenings of Divine judgment came upon him. He humbled himself before God : and God did respond to his better mind, and was gracious to hold over awhile the threatened judgments. In this way God established the fact of His superabundant anxiety concerning the 'right mind,' the good moral character ; showing the production of such character to be the end and purpose of His judgments, and plainly indicating that the judgments need never descend, if the desired end can be accomplished apart from them. All Divine threatenings and judgments are necessary means to secure definite ends. They are never used if the ends can be otherwise attained. The judgments need never fall, if the threatenings suffice.

*Bishop Wordsworth*, observing that Ahab's repentance was only superficial and temporary, inquires whether the purposes of God, Who had just before denounced the heaviest woes on Ahab, could be changed by such a show of repentance as that. As an answer the Bishop suggests that God 'deals with men exactly as they deal with Him ; He metes to them according to their own measure.' God's dealings with Ahab were exactly proportioned and adjusted to Ahab's own conduct. To a temporary and superficial repentance, God adapted a punishment modified by certain temporary and local incidents. He gave him the promise of a prorogation of temporal punishment in this world, but He gave him no promise of remission of future and eternal punishment, which is the proper penalty of sin. God thus showed that H

does not overlook any effort, however feeble, toward repentance. He is compassionate and merciful; ‘He cherishes the least sparks of goodness in anyone.’ If a real contrition is manifested in act, then, O God, Who does not despise even the slightest external symptom of repentance, will certainly accept and reward it.

### ‘Borrow’ or ‘Beg.’

EXODUS iii. 21, 22: ‘And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall ask of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians’ (*Rev. er.*). The *Auth. Ver.* reads ‘borrow.’

**Difficulty.**—*Can this receiving without any intention of returning be explained or justified by any customs of the age, or special circumstances connected with the events thus foretold to Moses?*

**Explanation.**—The apparent dishonesty of thus ‘borrowing’ and intending to keep has been made much of by those who attack the morality of the Old Testament; but the Revisers have now sealed the very satisfactory explanation which has often been given, that the word translated ‘borrow’ really means ‘ask’ or ‘beg’; and so the Israelites in fact received these jewels as gifts, and not as loans; the matter being perfectly honourable and straightforward on both sides.

But as such lavish presentations of household property seem very strange to our modern and Western notions, the incident may be carefully studied in the light of our knowledge of ancient times and Eastern lands.

It should be remembered that Moses had demanded liberty for the people of Israel to go three days’ journey into the desert districts, in order to hold a great festival in honour of Jehovah, their God. This was the distinct form of their demand, and this was what the Egyptian people understood them to wish. But when the Orientals go to a festival, they always put on their best dresses and jewels. They would quite understand the request of the Israelite women for jewels and raiment to go to their festival in; and though, if the request had been made before the plagues and the death of the first-born had numbed and affrighted the Egyptian women, they would have refused it, and probably added insults; with their children dead in their houses, and in their alarm at what possible calamities might still hang over them, they were glad enough to give jewels and anything else, if only these dreadful Israelites could be got rid of out of the land.

Some writers, as *Kitto*, think the Israelites may have been directed to ask that the payment of what was due to them might be made in light and valuable articles, suitable for convenient carriage in the approaching journey. But this cannot be accepted, because the demand was made, not by the men of those who employed them in the brickyards and the fields, but by the women of the Egyptian women; and the gift of the jewels was made under the impulse of the excitement produced by the universal death of the first-born, which would fill the women with passionate and unrestrained grief.

One point of difficulty remains. Hebrew women would only have access to comparatively poor Egyptian women; then how came such women to be possessed of such jewels and rich clothing? As there are no banks in the East where money can be safely stored, it is quite customary for those who have saved to invest their savings in jewels which are easily carried about; and the safest place for the keeping of these jewels is on their wives' persons: an Eastern married woman is usually overloaded with jewellery; 'the wife of a tradesman, or of a dragoman, is often in possession of bracelets and collars of gold which in Europe would indicate wealth or high station.'

'Asking for presents is a common practice in the East, and persons who were quitting their homes to set out on a long journey through a strange country would have abundant excuse, if any had been needed, for soliciting aid from their richer neighbours.'

## Transference of Divine Judgment to Descendants.

1 KINGS xxi. 29: 'Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.'

**Question.**—*Can the righteousness of God, in thus removing the judgments on a man's sins to his children, be vindicated?*

**Answer.**—The sin which Elijah denounced was not the private sin of an individual, but the public sin of a ruler. The murder of Naboth was not a private assassination, but an execution through the abuse of the forms of public law. It was also the act of Ahab's house—a family act, which the mother devised and carried through, and the father virtually approved by accepting what was gained by it. Elijah deals with it, therefore, as a dynastic sin, which must be met by a dynastic punishment.

With the personal punishment of Ahab Elijah is not so much concerned as with the judgment of Ahab's house, or dynasty, whose iniquity was now abundantly illustrated; this last public injustice made their 'cup run over.' A *man* is punished for his sins as ex-

pressions of his character ; a family is punished for the sins of its father and head ; and a kingdom is punished for the sins of its ruler, who is regarded as its representative. Unless we can clearly see the distinction between race judgments, national judgments, dynastic judgments, and personal judgments, very much of the Divine dealing with men must seem to us confused and confusing.

Judgment must come on families and on communities for the world's sake, as part of the moral training of the race. And no better warning of the evil of sin can be given than is found in the fact that a man cannot keep his sin to himself. If he sins as a father, he involves his children. If he sins as a king, he involves his people. In no other way could God so effectually show the evil of sin to the mass of humanity.

Elijah's curse bore relation to the sin of the *royal house*, so it fell on the royal house. But the son on whom it fell was in full sympathy with the schemes and spirit of Ahab's dynasty, and fully maintained its traditions. And it should be carefully noticed, that all race judgments and national judgments are limited to events happening *in this earth's sphere*. Nothing is told us concerning the relations of God to bad kings in the eternal world. There they are but men, and motive, will, intention, are all duly appraised.

There is a difficulty as to the fulfilment of Elijah's curse on Ahab and on his son, which the '*Speaker's Commentary*' efficiently removes. (See verse 19 ; and 2 Kings ix. 26.) 'It may be asked, How was this prophecy fulfilled, since the dogs licked Ahab's blood, not in Jezreel, but in Samaria? (1 Kings xxii. 38). The answer seems to be that the prophecy had a double fulfilment. The main fulfilment was by the casting of the dead body of Jehoram into Naboth's plot of ground at Jezreel, where, like Naboth's, it was left for the dogs to eat (2 Kings ix. 25). This spot, which was just outside the city wall, and close to a gate, was probably the actual scene of Naboth's execution. Here, "in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth," did dogs lick Ahab's blood, that is, his son's blood, the execution of the full retaliatory sentence having been deferred to the days of his son, formally and explicitly, on Ahab's repentance. But, beside this, there was a secondary fulfilment of the prophecy, when, not at Jezreel, but at Samaria, the actual blood of Ahab himself, notwithstanding the promise made him on his repentance, was licked by dogs (1 Kings xxii. 38), only in a way that implied no disgrace.'

The point of the explanation given above, that God deals with dynasties by inflicting dynastic judgments, may be further illustrated by such passages as 1 Kings xiii. 34 ; 2 Kings x. 30, etc.

## Sojourn in Moab, and Wives of Moab.

RUTH i. 1, 3, 4, 5: 'And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died: and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab. And Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them.'

**Difficulty.**—*Did not Elimelech sin in going to Moab, and his sons sin in marrying women of Moab? And were not the calamities which came judgments on their sins?*

**Explanation.**—There seems to be good reason for thinking that the sojourn in Moab was a matter of sheer necessity, the best possible action in circumstances of extreme difficulty. It was not the best thing, that would have been to have waited *on* God, and waited *for* God, in a time of sore need and perplexity. But it was the next best thing, especially when, for the sake of the flocks and herds, something must be done at once. We need not assume, on Elimelech's part, a wilful disobedience, but only a failure from the higher trust in God, which is always for men a difficult attainment. He was wrong by pressure of necessity, rather than in wilfulness.

S. Cox, the well-known expositor, meets the question, Why did Elimelech select Moab for his sojourn? 'The usual resort of the clans of Canaan and its vicinity in time of famine was Egypt. Why, then, did not Elimelech, like his great forefathers, either go or send down to Egypt for corn?

'The probability is that he would have sent or gone if the road to Egypt had not been closed. All the notes of time in the Book of Ruth imply that it was while the venerable but miserable Eli was judge that Elimelech resolved to leave his ancestral fields: and while Eli was judge there was perpetual war with Philistia. When the Philistines heard that the tribes of Israel were oppressed by famine, they would be sure to guard the high road to Egypt, in order to prevent their famishing foes from procuring supplies from the vast public granaries of that opulent and powerful empire.'

'Was it *wrong* of Elimelech to abandon his native land, in order to sojourn with Moab until the famine was past? No doubt it was wrong; and what made it wrong, according to the Old Testament standard, was that he was abandoning his place among the elect people to sojourn among the heathen, whose social life, whose very worship, was unutterably licentious and degrading. If it were right of *him* to abandon his place, it would not have been wrong for all Beth-lehem, nay, for all Judah; and then how could the Divine purpose concerning Israel have taken effect?'

As to the young men, they do not seem to have married until after their father's death, and this suggests that they knew he would disapprove of such an idolatrous connection, for the daughters of Moab were peculiarly obnoxious to the faithful Israelites. No Israelite might marry a Canaanite (Deut. vii. 3); and no Moabite could be received into the congregation (Deut. xxiii. 3). The first evil of going into the heathen country was followed by the worse evil of intermarrying with the heathen Moabites.

But we need to be very careful in attempting to fix calamity as judgment on individual sin. Our Lord taught us that this is never our province, and that we can seldom, if ever, do it wisely. There can be little doubt that the writer of this book thought both Elimelech and his sons to blame, and held 'the calamities which fell on him and his house to be a judgment on his sin.' It is interesting to note that the Targum on verse 4 reads thus: '*They transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and took foreign wives from among the daughters of Moab.*' We see in this story that personal and family sins are within the Divine cognizance, and are surely punished, in the Divine providence, by family calamities.

## David's Treatment of Mephibosheth.

2 SAMUEL xix. 29: 'And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.'

**Difficulty.**—*Did not David, by this decision, recognise and reward unfaithfulness and injustice?*

**Explanation.**—At first sight there does seem some indication of an impatient and unreasonable temper. Ziba, it seems, was the means of bringing the fact of the existence of Mephibosheth to the knowledge of David; but, as the prince was helplessly lame, he could not personally manage the estates which David restored to him, so Ziba was appointed his farm-steward, with an agreement that half the produce of the estates was to be forwarded for the support of the young prince at Jerusalem; the other half would be required for the expenses of working the estate, and for the support of Ziba. This was altogether an equitable and reasonable arrangement, and should have proved quite satisfactory to Ziba.

Either the necessities of Ziba's family, or an accession of the spirit of ambition and greed, or the fact that a favourable opportunity for becoming suddenly rich presented itself, led Ziba to attempt the deception of David, and the misrepresentation of his master, at the time of Absalom's rebellion. Meeting David as he fled from Jeru-

salem, Ziba, with a skilful affectation of loyalty, told the king the shameful lie that his master had stayed in Jerusalem in the belief that he would be made king, now David had fled. Excited and anxious as David was, such news would greatly embitter him; and so, without waiting for any proofs, he rewarded the fawning, unfaithful Ziba with the gift of all the possessions of the unfortunate prince. Ziba gained his end, but it remained to be seen whether he could keep what he had gained.

It should be observed that, in connection with the overthrow of Absalom, David acted very weakly. The rebellion would have been successful, humanly speaking, but for the energy of Joab. After Absalom's death David was for some time in a moody condition, from which he was only roused by Joab's plain and almost fierce language. In the scenes of the restoration we can see that the supreme idea of David was just to let things be as they were before the rebellion, and he wanted all connected with it to be forgotten as speedily as possible; it was a passage in his history which he would gladly close up and hide away, and never even be reminded of again. In this spirit he dealt with Shimei and Ziba—'let things be just as they were.'

Mephibosheth was not likely to allow himself to lie under the reproach of Ziba; but there was an abjectness about his approach to David which must have annoyed David, and disposed him to close a painful scene without attempting to decide who was right and who was wrong. The words he used simply mean, 'Don't quarrel over the matter. I can't bear any disputing. Justice will be done if you and Ziba resume your old relations, and you have half the produce of the estates, as you did before this sad rebellion.' It should be clearly seen that Ziba did not *retain* what he had gained by his wrong-doing. He was put back into his old position as a steward; and had the misery of feeling that he had really injured no one but himself, by his shameful and ambitious plot.

It must be admitted that good expositors see in this incident signs of the grave weakness of David, and a sad instance of successful villainy.

*Dr. Geikie* writes: 'It seems strange that David, so able in many respects, should have been so simple in others. Fresh calumnies had evidently again prejudiced him against the son of his old friend, who, instead of obtaining his grandfather's lands in full, and seeing the slanderer justly punished, was dismissed with the restoration of only half of his patrimony, Ziba receiving the other. Thus does successful villainy often flourish, and modest merit suffer at the hands of

unprincipled audacity, even under a prince anxious to do justice to all. So far as the brief notice left of the incident goes, David had little to be proud of in his treatment of the son of such a matchless friend.'

*Dr. F. Gardiner*, in '*Ellicott's Commentary*,' says that 'either because David had still some doubt of the real merits of the case, or more probably because he was unwilling, for political reasons, to offend Ziba, he resorts to that half-way and compromise course which was both weak and unjust.'

But such estimates of David's act are based on the assumption that David gave one-half of the property of Mephibosheth over to the possession of Ziba, whereas the fact seems to be that he did but restore the original agreement. This is mentioned in 2 Sam. ix. 10. 'Thou, therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants shalt till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat.' Knowledge of Eastern customs assures the exceeding probability that the amount for Mephibosheth was fixed at *half-produce*, or half the land, as it is called. This is made quite plain by the following explanation :

'The ancient way of tenancy—nor is it yet quite disused—was that of occupying the land, and giving the proprietor a certain annual portion of the fruits of it. Sometimes the tenant paid one-half of the annual produce, and such, in the judgment of the best critics, was Ziba to Mephibosheth, as he had before been to Saul. So that Ziba, having half the fruits for his labour, had, in effect, half the land. Upon Ziba's misinformation, the whole was given to him (as the confiscated property of a rebel); David now revokes that grant, and restores his first decree; for the words plainly refer to a former decree, now re-established, whereby Saul's estate was divided between Mephibosheth as proprietor, and Ziba, as having half its fruits for the labour of cultivation.'

## The Imprecatory Psalms.

PSALM cix. 20 : 'Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the Lord, and of them that speak evil against my soul.' (See verses 1-19, and also Psalm v. 8-10, vii. 11-17, xxxv., lviii. 10, lxix.).

**Question.**—*Can any explanation relieve our feeling that such a spirit of personal revenge was utterly unworthy of one who professed to be a godly man?*

**Answer.**—The relief we find most satisfactory comes from observing that, in all these cases, we have the free outpouring of a man's feelings and wishes to God, in a time of great excitement; and

not the outpouring of curses *upon*, or even in the hearing of, the man's enemies. It is characteristic of the Divine love that it wants our perfect confidence and openness. We must be just ourselves—be it a bad mood or a good mood that we are in—when we come before God. And here we find David in a bad mood, and he could not do a wiser thing than just speak out all the dreadful things of his passion to God. That would soon bring him relief, and when all was uttered out he would return upon kindlier and better feelings. These so-called imprecatory psalms have for us this most valuable mission: they teach us that, in the infinite patience and gentleness of our heavenly Father, He permits His children to open out their whole hearts to Him, and tell Him their complaints, their troubles, and even the revengeful feelings they may be cherishing. So we do not see in these psalms any *requests*, only the passionate outpouring of a heart overwhelmed with the cruel treatment it has received. Read in this way, the burden of associating such curses with a godly man is entirely removed.

But very different explanations have been given by Biblical writers, and some notes of these may be added.

The '*Speaker's Commentary*' says: 'The Psalmist, contemned and despised by those to whom he had done good, and by whom he had been cursed often and persecuted to death, betakes himself at first to prayer as his single refuge; then addresses himself to God, with Whom is vengeance, and hurls back the curse, which his foes had imprecated upon him, upon themselves with a fire and energy which seem to some surprising in this divine collection of hymns. But is a Christian spirit to be expected always in the Psalms? Would the words of Christ have been uttered (Matt. v. 43, 44, etc.) if the spirit which animated the Jewish people, and is exhibited not unfrequently in their annals, had been always that which He came to inculcate? Under the Old Covenant, calamity, extending from father to son, was the meed of transgression; prosperity, *vice versâ*, of obedience; and these prayers of the Psalmist may express the wish that God's providential government of His people should be asserted in the chastisement of the enemy of God and man.'

This view is supported by *Jennings* and *Lowe*: 'Regarded from a Christian point of view, the animosity of the Psalmist does indeed appear extravagant and sinful. But if it be read with due consideration of the real religious and moral status of the Jew, we shall find no occasion to evade the natural meaning of this psalm of imprecation. The Mosaic revelation lays much less stress upon the duty of forgiveness than the Gospel does; and, moreover, the hostile attitude

which the Jewish nation had perforce to assume towards the entire Gentile world was not likely to engender a submissive or forbearing spirit in the victims of either public or private oppression. But it would be unfair to ascribe the imprecations of this psalm altogether to feelings of mere resentment. Pious indignation at the triumph of evil must here be recognised as one, if not a chief, incentive.'

*Dean Perowne* follows on the same lines: 'Terrible as these denunciations undoubtedly are, to be accounted for by the spirit of the Old Dispensation, not to be defended by that of the New, still let us learn to estimate them aright. This is the *natural* voice of righteousness persecuted. These are the accents of the martyr, not smarting only with a sense of personal suffering, but feeling acutely, and hating nobly, the triumph of wickedness.'

The earlier ideas of the psalm are well represented by *St. Augustine*: 'These words of this psalm are not spoken by the impulse of vindictive passion, but from the calmness and clearness of Divine omniscience, which sees and declares what is future as if it were present, and which announces that God's justice will certainly inflict what they who provoke it and trifle with it deserve and bring on themselves. But let not any man therefore abuse such language as this into a plea for rendering evil for evil, which Christ forbids us to do. What is here declared is not uttered from the feelings of an accuser who wishes for the punishment of his adversary, but from the deliberate wisdom of a judge who loves equity and maintains it. The former renders evil for evil; but the latter, even when he punishes, does not render evil for evil, but he administers what is just to the unjust; and what is just is always good, and what is good is always pleasing and an object of desire. The just Judge does not punish for love of anyone's misery, which would be to render evil for evil; but He punishes for love of justice, and in this sense renders good for evil. Therefore, in reading this psalm, let us be warned against that blind self-adulation which presumes that God will not be true to His own word, and will not punish the guilty; and let us not hence derive a plea for our own vindictive passions, as if it were not a sin to render evil for evil. But let us listen to what this divine psalm teaches us; and in the words of its malediction, pronounced on the wicked, let us see a Divine prophecy of the certain punishment of sin, and let us contemplate God administering His own everlasting laws with exact retributive justice.'

'*Ellicott's Commentary*' does not regard the psalm as having a personal character. 'Whatever its origin, whoever the original object of the imprecations, it is certain that they become public, ecclesias-

tical, national. It is quite possible that from the first the writer spoke in the name of the persecuted nation against some oppressive heathen prince, such as Antiochus Epiphanes.'

A modern effort to get rid of the difficulty, which was started by *Kennicott* and *Mendelssohn*, has been made by *Mr. Taylor*, in his work 'The Gospel in the Law.' He supposes the words of the psalm not to be uttered by the Psalmist, but to be merely cited by him as the words of his enemies directed against himself. We have only at the end of verse 5 to supply the word 'saying,' which is so commonly omitted in Hebrew before quotations, and all that follows to the end of verse 19 may be regarded as the malediction of the Psalmist's enemies. This view, however, has not met with much favour.

### The Lord's Enmity against Amalek.

EXODUS xvii. 8, 16: 'Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. . . . For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.' *Literally*, 'He said, Because [a] hand [is] on the throne of the Lord, a war of the Lord against Amalek from generation to generation.' (See margin.)

**Question.**—*Wherein lay the aggravation of the sin of Amalek which made necessary so severe a judgment?*

**Answer.**—Two explanations may be given of this incident. One is well expressed in the following notes from the '*Speaker's Commentary*' and '*Ellicott's Commentary*':

'The attack upon the Israelites was made under circumstances, at a time and place, fully explained by what is known of the peninsula. It occurred about two months after the Exodus, towards the end of May or early in June, when the Bedouins leave the lower plains in order to find pasture for their flocks on the cooler heights. The approach of the Israelites to Sinai would of course attract notice, and no cause of warfare is more common than a dispute for the right of pasturage. The Amalekites were at that time the most powerful race in the peninsula, which from the earliest ages was peopled by fierce and warlike tribes, with whom the Pharaohs, from the third dynasty downwards, were engaged in constant struggles. It may be conjectured that reports of the marvellous supply of water may have reached the natives, and accelerated their movements. On this occasion Amalek took the position recognised in the Sacred History as the chief of the heathens (Num. xxiv. 20), the first among the heathens who attacked God's people, and as such marked out for punishment (see 1 Sam. xv. 21), especially merited by them as de-

scendants of the elder brother of Jacob, and therefore near kinsmen of the Israelites.'

*Prof. Rawlinson*, in '*Ellicott's Commentary*,' says:—'The Amalekites had not been previously (except in the anticipatory notice of Genesis xiv. 7) mentioned as a nation. They early became the predominant people in the Sinaitic peninsula. Though Edomites, they were always regarded as a distinct race, and one especially hostile to Israel (ver. 16). Their present hostility was not altogether unprovoked. No doubt they regarded the Sinaitic region as their own, and as the most valuable portion of their territory, since it contained their summer and autumn pastures. During their absence in its more northern portion, where there was pasture for their flocks after the spring rains, a swarm of emigrants had occupied their best lands, and threatened to seize the remainder. Naturally they would resent the occupation. They would not understand that it was only temporary. They would regard the Israelites as intruders, robbers—persons entitled to scant favour at their hands. Accordingly, they swooped upon them without mercy, attacked their rear as they were upon the march, cut off their stragglers, and slew many that were 'feeble, faint, and weary' (Deut. xxv. 17, 18). They then encamped in their neighbourhood, with the design of renewing the struggle on the next day. It was under these circumstances that Moses had to make his arrangements. Amalek's sin was that, after all the signs and wonders which had shown the Israelites to be God's peculiar people, he braved God's displeasure by attacking them. To this audacity and contempt of Jehovah's power he added a cruel pitilessness, when he fell upon the rear of an almost unarmed host at a time when they were "faint and weary."'

But *Dr. J. L. Porter*, in his addition to *Kitto's* chapter on Rephidim, best brings out the aggravation of the sin of these Amalekites, and adds a point of importance, which the other writers seem to have missed. He thinks Rephidim was in Wady esh-Sheikh, which falls into Feirân after sweeping round northwards in a semi-circle from the base of Mount Sinai. It forms the only practicable approach from the westward to that mountain. In Wady Feirân there was one of the largest fountains in the whole peninsula. At Rephidim there was no water, and Moses was commanded to 'go on before' with the elders, and 'smite the rock in Horeb.'

'The attack of the Amalekites appears to have followed immediately the miracle of the smitten rock; and as it was begun by an attack upon the rear of the Israelites—upon "all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary"—it would seem pro-

bable that it took place when the able-bodied men had gone forward with Moses and the elders to procure water. This throws new light upon the incident. The people were taken by surprise, and the Amalekites gained a temporary advantage.

'It is usual to connect the Amalekites with Wady Feirân, and to represent the battle as a brave attempt on their part to defend the paradise of their desert home. But this is without any satisfactory evidence. The home of the Amalekites was away upon the borders of Palestine, and it is questionable whether they had ever any possessions among the mountains of Sinai. Why, then, did they attack the Israelites? It would seem that they knew of the intention of the people to invade Canaan. They were watching their movements. When they saw them encamp at Rephidim, they feared they were about to advance northwards. Consequently, they embraced what they deemed a favourable opportunity, swept down through the passes from the northern plateau, and attacked them in the rear thinking thus to destroy them by one bold stroke.'

The point of the judgment on Amalek was that Israel should never make any league with this nation, but ever regard the Amalekites as irreconcilable enemies, doomed to ruin. Probably the severity of the judgment is in part due to the fact that this was the first hostile attack on Israel, and a profound impression needed to be produced on other tribes, which would keep them from attempting to check the Israelite progress.

## The Slaughter of the Baal Prophets.

1 KINGS xviii. 40: 'And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.'

**Question.**—*Was this terrible slaughter in any sense necessary to the vindication of Jehovah as God, which was the mission entrusted to Elijah?*

**Answer.**—It was, as the matter would be regarded in that age and in accordance with prevailing national and religious sentiments. The life of proved deceivers of the people was fairly forfeited. Elijah's life would most certainly have been taken if he had failed to bring down the fire: and the mere fact of the Baal representative being *numerous* does not affect the justice of their execution. They were destroyed by the sudden indignation of the people, which Elijah directed. It was a case of *Lynch Law*, with a clear basis of natural justice.

This may suffice for a general answer, but it is possible to be much more precise in the explanation of the incident, which certainly seems to reveal a sanguinary disposition in Elijah. *Dean Stanley* fully enters into the spirit of the scene, and this gives the best defence of Elijah's act. Things done in the impulse of high excitement ought not to be judged as if they were the deliberate decisions of the quiet and judicial hour. 'Elijah was now the ruler of the nation. His word was law. In that sudden revulsion of feeling "the wheel had made full cycle round." The persecutors became the victims. The prophets of Baal were seized; they were swept away by the wild multitude. Elijah himself led them down the mountain slopes to the gorge of the Kishon. As Phinehas, as Samuel, before him, so Elijah now took upon himself the dreadful office of executioner.'

If Jehovah is King of the country, and His claim is acknowledged, then He needs to have an executioner to carry out His kingly indignation against those who had refused His authority and persecuted His servants.

It may further be suggested that it was advisable, for the people's sake, to make the influence of Baalism in the land henceforth difficult. There would be a rebound from the excitement of the Carmel scene, and of this the Baal prophets would make skilful occasion to revive their power. And we may add that, under the theocracy, a prophet, directly commissioned by Jehovah, had the right to step in and execute Jehovah's laws whensoever the king failed in his duty.

As this is an unusually involved and perplexing subject, three passages may be given, which gather up the above points of explanation, and enforce them with the authority of judicious and trusted writers.

*Kitto* says: 'The appeal of Elijah was to the people. He called upon them to inflict, then and there, upon these ringleaders of the people in idolatry, the punishment which the law denounced, and which as would have been inflicted upon himself had the victory been on their side; and the king seems to have been too awe-stricken to interfere. From the character of Elijah, we have no doubt that he executed this act of blood heartily, and with entire satisfaction. It is not for us to vindicate him. The only question is, Was this in accordance with the law, and with the spirit of the times? It certainly was. And Britons, not so much as fifty years ago, perished under their own laws, with perfect peace of mind, upon far less heinous offenders, the deadly executions which we now regard with horror. If, then, in looking back upon the last generation, we make allowance for this great change of law and sentiment within so

short a time, we must needs make the same allowance in surveying the more remote, and less refined, age in which Elijah lived.'

This statement respecting the severities of British law of fifty years ago is well illustrated by a passage from Lord Lytton's life of his father, the well-known novel-writer, Bulwer Lytton: 'The number of persons executed in the seven years from 1819 to 1825 was 57. Their offences were as follows: Arson and other wilful burning property, 10. Burglary, 128. Cattle-stealing, 2. Maliciously killing, Forgery and uttering forged instruments, 62. Horse-stealing, 2. Housebreaking in the daytime and larceny, 9. Larceny in dwelling houses to the value of forty shillings, 27. Secreting and stealing letters containing bank-notes, 5. Murder, 101. Shooting, stabbing and administering poison with intent to murder, 30. Rape, 31. Riots (remaining assembled with rioters one hour after the Riot Act had been read), 1. Robbery from the person on the highway and other places, 95. Sacrilege, 2. Sheep-stealing, 29. Unnatural offences, 1. High treason, 5. From these figures it appears that, of all the persons who were hanged in England between the years 1819 and 1825 inclusive, *less than one-fifth were guilty of the crime to which capital punishment is now confined.*'

But the most remarkable illustration of the change which circumstances make in the public estimate of general executions and scenes of slaughter is given by *Dean Stanley* in his lecture on the extermination of the Canaanites:—'In the late Indian Mutiny, at the time when the belief in the Sepoy atrocities (since exploded) prevailed throughout India, it will be in the memory of some that letters were received from India, from conscientious and religious men, containing phrases to this effect. "The Book of Joshua is now being read in church. It expresses exactly what we are all feeling. I never before understood the force of that part of the Bible. It is the only rule for us to follow." I do not quote this sentiment to approve of it. I quote it to show that what could be felt, even for a moment, by civilized Christendom now, might well be pardoned, or even commended, in Jewish soldiers three thousand years ago.'

*Dr. Henry Allon*, writing in '*The Bible Educator*,' says:—'The slaughter of Baal's priests is to be justified only on theocratic principles. Thus Moses more than once put idolaters to death. Elijah demanded their death in the name of the Mosaic law (Exod. xxii. 2. Deut. xiii. 6-10; xvii. 1-7). They were not merely false teachers and imposters, but traitors and rebels against the national government. It was part of Ahab's guilt that he had not done the same. Probably the excitement of the people would have made it impossible

save them, even had it been lawful to do so. It is freely admitted t under any other than a theocratic government such a slaughter the priests of a false religion would have been both a crime and lunder—according, that is, to our modern notions; but then, in ness to those who have done such things, it should be rem- bered that such notions are scarcely three centuries old. ither Christendom, paganism, nor infidelity has long learned how ch greater and more effectual moral victories are than physical ermination.'

*Dr. Barry's* note, in '*Ellicott's Commentary*,' is as follows :—' This hless slaughter of Baal's prophets, as a judgment on their idolatry d perversion of the people, belongs alike to the fierce righteousness the character of Elijah, and to the spirit of the Old Law (see, for mple, Deut. xiii. 6-18; xvii. 2-7). The law was adapted to : "hardness of men's hearts." In the imperfect moral and religious ucation of those times, it did not recognise the difference between oral and political offences punishable by human law and the igious sin or apostasy which we have been taught to leave to the lgment of God alone; and it enjoined an unrelenting severity in e execution of righteous vengeance, which would be morally im- ssible to us, who have been taught to hate the sin, and yet spare, far as possible, the sinner.'

## Schemes for securing Wives for Benjamin.

JUDGES xxi. 14 : 'And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them ves which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead: and yet so they ficed them not.'

**Difficulty.**—*Does not such a dreadful story of atrocity and blood- ed dishonour the pages of God's Holy Word?*

**Explanation.**—The object of the narrator seems to be to give a vid picture of the society of that age, as introductory to the appoint ent of a king, whose authority should suppress such disorders. ut a further object may be discerned. He shows that, even in a me of such anarchy, God was watching over the nation, and would ot permit one section of it to be entirely rooted out. The singular ing is that the overruling Providence worked its purpose through acts f violence and treachery; the same kind of evil-doing that threatened e destruction of a tribe securing its recovery and restoration.

The key to the compiler's object in such an unveiling of the horrors f the age is found in the closing sentence of the book, verse 25 :— In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which

was right in his own eyes.' The disorders of the time arose from the want of some strong central authority.

The mission of such records in God's Word is one of supreme importance. The tendency of each age, and especially of later ages, is to overpraise humanity, and proclaim man's goodness, so that the world really needs no redemption. The resistance of that tendency is found in the simple records of history. Put nations under the very best influences, give them every possible advantage, and then let moral, governmental, and religious restraints go loose for a while, and the corruptions of men run riot, and produce anarchy, violence, and bloodshed, such as was seen in the days of the Judges. History, both sacred and profane, is the testimony to the truth of human depravity. The race needs—each individual needs—a Redeemer to deliver, and a King to rule in righteousness.

The story connected with the above passage is briefly as follows: In consequence of a terrible wrong done by a man of Benjamin, the other tribes had united in solemn vow to secure its annihilation. Benjamin fought bravely, but was at last defeated by a stratagem, and only 600 men managed to escape destruction out of some 27,000; the female inhabitants and the children being ruthlessly put to the sword. Presently some remorse seized the rest of the tribe, but action seemed impossible, because the vow taken included the pledge that no man should give his daughter to wife to a man of Benjamin. Wives could only be found for these 600 Benjamites by some sort of stratagem, some scheme by which the letter of the oath could be kept, while in actual fact it was broken. Such reservations always imperil sincerity and straightforwardness. We ought never to pledge what we *will* do in the future, because circumstances may arise which compel other conduct than we had resolved upon. In respect of vows and pledges, it may be said that they ought never to be taken, because 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

Four hundred wives were obtained by an expedition against Jabez-gilead. As these did not suffice, by a pious fraud the 200 men left were encouraged and permitted to seize at will the young Israelite women who were dancing at one of the religious feasts. The daughters were not *given*—so the oath was kept. They were obtained—and so the needs of the Benjamites were met. Such a story enforces our Saviour's command, 'Swear not at all.' 'The guilt of breaking a guilty vow is only the original guilt of ever having made it.'

## Divine Judgment on Moses.

NUMBERS xxvii. 12-14 : 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim, and behold the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, : Aaron thy brother was gathered : because ye rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation.'

**Difficulty.**—*Surely this is a needlessly severe judgment on a comparatively trivial fault, committed under extreme provocation.*

**Explanation.**—The moral estimate of a fault must take into account the position of influence and authority which the person who commits it may occupy. It is in this light only that the seriousness of Moses's failing can be properly estimated. His action dishonoured Jehovah in the eyes of the people ; and, therefore, in a very public and impressive way, the fact must be declared that sin never goes without punishment, even if it is committed by God's most trusted servants. God was teaching this people, Israel, by signs ; and even the great Moses must himself be held up before them as a sign for their warning against disobedience in small things.

The incident to which reference is made is recorded in Numbers xx. 5-13. The thing most prominent in it is certainly Moses' giving way to temper, and 'speaking unadvisedly with his lips' (Psa. cvi. 33), and angrily smiting the rock twice. A passionate impulsiveness was the weakness in the noble character of Moses. He learned to restrain it, but on this occasion he gave way. Now Moses was the one man who not only gave to men the will of God, but also, in his own intercourse with men, showed them the character of God. This makes the failure of Moses of such supreme importance. Men were getting their ideas of Jehovah very largely from the spirit, character, and relations of Moses. Then how false a view of God was presented by such impetuosity, passion, and calling of bad names, as is recorded in Numbers xx. 10, 11. It was not that Moses failed in faith, but he did not maintain that close reliance on God which would have enabled him to keep calm, and act wisely, even in circumstances of most extreme provocation.

*Bishop Wordsworth* thinks the sin of Moses consisted in two things : 1. In calling the people's attention to himself as if he were the author and donor of the gift of water, and saying, 'Must *we* fetch you water out of the rock?' thus assuming to himself the power of bringing the water out of the rock, instead of raising their eyes to God, who vouchsafed to give the water through his ministry and instrumentality. And 2, in smiting the rock *twice*—literally, with

two strokes, in his impatience, as if the water was to be elicited by the application of man's strength, and not by God's word, when he was commanded to *speak* to it *once*. He thus showed want of faith and was guilty of disobedience; and he sinned in these respects *publicly*, in the eyes of the people committed to his charge by God.'

The simple note in the '*Speaker's Commentary*' says all that really needs to be said on the subject. 'In fact, the faithful servant of God, worn out by the reiterated perversities of the people, at last breaks down; and, in the actual discharge of his duty as God's representative before Israel, acts unworthily of the great functions entrusted to him. Thus Moses did not "sanctify God in the eyes of the children of Israel." Aaron might have checked the intemperate words and acts of Moses, and did not. Hence God punishes both by withdrawing them from their work for Him, and handing over it to the accomplishment to another.'

### Laban's Duplicity.

GENESIS xxix. 26 : 'And Laban said, It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Was Laban's deceitful scheme in any sense justified by the customs of the country; or did his excuse only add insult to injury?*

**Answer.**—Several things connected with Arab marriage customs need to be understood before we can estimate fairly the incident narrated in this chapter. In the East the bride is always, in a sense purchased: the applicant for her has to bring rich presents, and bargain with the relatives of the bride. This is illustrated in the case of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah. Isaac did not go to negotiate for her himself. Isaac's father sent a confidential servant, and with him handsome presents. By this servant the matter was arranged with the family of Rebekah. Jacob, however, had no property, so could make no presents; he could only offer his personal services.

It is not generally known that it is still the custom among the Arabs to prefer a relative as the husband of a daughter; or that, on giving a moderate dowry, the elder cousins can claim the elder daughters in marriage, and the younger cousins the younger daughters. According to this custom, Jacob, being a second son, had a recognised claim to Rachel, the younger daughter. The Rabbins have a very curious tradition, which shows the prevalence of the idea of cousinly alliance; they say that Leah's eyes were weak from weeping, because Esau, the elder cousin, had not come to marry her.

The deception practised upon Jacob was easily managed, because in the East the bride is always brought to the bridegroom closely veiled. The veil covers the whole body, and is far larger than that ordinarily worn. Now-a-days the bride's veil is usually red. No doubt the sisters were nearly alike in size, figure, voice, etc., which helped to carry through the deception. It is clear, however, that Leah must have been a willing party to the fraud, if she did not actually suggest it.

The marriage festival usually lasted a week (Judges xiv. 12), and to have forsaken Leah during this period would have been to offer her an insult which her brothers must have avenged.

It is very doubtful whether there was any such custom as Laban refers to; and if there had been, he was bound in honour to have mentioned it when Jacob negotiated for Rachel. The only hint of such a custom we can hear of is given by *Lane*, who says that in Egypt a father objects to marry a younger daughter before an elder. *Inglis* says, 'The apology of Laban that the younger sister could not be married before the elder, according to the custom of the tribe, cannot be admitted. A baser fraud and a more cruel injury it was impossible to inflict on any man, which no subsequent act could repair. It was not Jacob only, but his own daughter Rachel, whose happiness he sacrificed to his covetousness.'

*Jamieson* remarks that 'this is too much the way of the people of the East still. The duty of marrying an elder daughter before a younger, the tricks which parents take to get off an elder daughter that is plain or deformed, and in which they are favoured by the long bridal veil that entirely conceals her features all the wedding-day, and the prolongation for a week of the marriage festivities among the greater sheikhs, are accordant with the habits of the people in Arabia and Armenia in the present day.'

## God's Purpose working through Samson's Wilfulness.

JUDGES xiv. 4: 'But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord; for he sought an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines had rule over Israel.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Does God's overruling of man's wilfulness and disobedience for the accomplishment of His purposes in any sense relieve or lighten the sin of such wilfulness?*

**Answer.**—There is a sort of uncertain sentiment prevailing that it does, and that a man's wrong-doings will not bring him under Divine judgment if, in any special way, God overrules and uses the

wrong done. But only a little consideration is necessary in order to dispel such a notion, which is indeed directly opposed to Scripture teaching. God's providence is the supreme direction of all events and actions to the accomplishment of high, wise, gracious, Divine purposes, but it in no way interferes with the character of events or the quality of actions. Man is responsible for his conduct in the light of the laws of truth and righteousness and duty which have been revealed to him, and with that responsibility God's supreme overrulings, in the large interests of humanity, in no way interfere.

There is nothing to commend in this conduct of Samson's. He acted throughout in sheer wilfulness. He resisted right and wise parental advice. He broke well-known Mosaic rules. He brought all concerned in the matter into trouble. But, accustomed to trace in everything the great providential workings, the writer of this record sees, even in such wilfulness, a link in a chain of events that issued at last in national deliverance.

He would be a strange God indeed who could only control and use the *good* things done by men. It is the glory of Jehovah that His knowledge and power cover the whole life of every man; and we must all work towards the fulfilment of His purpose by our *evil* as well as by our *good*; but this can never alter the fact, that for our *evil* there is due punishment, and for our *good* due reward.

*Kitto* expresses very simply the point on which the answer to this difficulty should rest: 'It is worthy of note, that when Samson grew up, all the attachments which he successively formed were to females of the Philistines—the power that held Southern Israel in bondage. No daughter of his own people appears to have gained his attention at any time. There was, as intimated, a Providence in this, that therefrom might result circumstances which should bring him into collision with the Philistines, disgraceful and disastrous to them.'

If the expression, 'for he sought an occasion,' can be applied to Samson (and this is certainly the more natural way of reading the passage, though good commentators prefer to think that Jehovah is meant), then the verse is relieved of all its difficulty, for we are to understand that Samson sought these Philistine alliances, not on the impulse of sensual passion, but in loyalty to his mission, and as the best mode of doing that life-work which had been entrusted to him. His parents did not understand that he was thus acting in order to make occasions for quarrel which should issue in national deliverance.

All that can be said on the expression, 'it was of the Lord,' is that

in this marriage God was overruling the course of events to the furtherance of His own designs. He makes even the weakness and fierceness of man redound to His praise. It is the strong sense of the Divine rule which we find even in heathen writers, so that, in the very opening lines of Homer, we find the poet saying 'that amid all the crimes and passions of men the counsel of Zeus was being accomplished.'

## The Evil of Usury.

NEHEMIAH v. 7: 'Then I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, everyone of his brother. And I held a great assembly against them.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*What constitutes usury; and is the lending of money on security and interest of necessity and always an evil?*

**Answer.**—It may be possible to recognise the very serious social evil into which the people had fallen in Nehemiah's time, and the importance of stern legislative dealings with the evil, and yet we may have no clear views of the limitations under which the lending of property should be put.

In the dealings of God's people among themselves they were to be guided by a distinct rule. 'If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury' (Exod. xxii. 25). But, singularly enough, usury towards strangers was tolerated (Deut. xxiii. 20). By the term 'usury' is commonly understood an unlawful profit. Perhaps the idea in the word may be thus expressed: it is such an exaction, by way of security and interest, *as puts in peril the principal*.

Some advanced Socialists in these days earnestly contend that no man is justified in taking interest on loaned money. But common sense replies, that 'It seems as lawful for me to receive interest for money, which another takes pains with, improves, but runs the risk of in trade, as it is to receive rent for my land which another takes pains with, improves, but runs the hazard of in husbandry.'

Before God, the evil of usury must be the getting of our personal advantage out of the poverty and distress of others, which is opposed to the Divine ideas of charity, brotherliness, and mutual consideration. To make any terms based on the distress of another is always unlovely in God's sight. To get possession of a neighbour's estate, by foreclosing mortgages made in times of temporary distress, was to sin against the spirit, and indeed the actual terms, of the Jewish covenant.

*Volney* says that the ordinary rate of interest in Syria, in his time,

was twenty per cent., and such percentage always imperils the principal. Money may be lent on interest still, providing the person borrowing the money is able to use it so as to secure a better return than he has to give in interest. Usury begins as soon as interest must be paid out of principal, because the borrower cannot earn with the money the amount of interest demanded.

*Ewald* explains that 'whoever possesses external property, and makes a diligent use of it, finds it increase under his hands. It is therefore no more than fair that such a possession, if borrowed for a time by another, whether merely in consequence of indigence or in order to extend his business therewith, shall be returned by him to its owner along with a corresponding increase. Thus even property, money, or anything else, which is lent to another, bears fruit for its owner, grows, sometimes most luxuriantly, and increases for his benefit with greater or less rapidity.'

But the evil of this among the ancients was that the percentage of the interest was entirely left to the freewill of individuals. The rate varied much, but was for the most part extravagant, and this often led to a cruel oppression of the poorer classes, and consequently to dangerous disturbances of the public peace. A debtor was regarded as completely at the mercy of the creditor, almost as his bondsman and subject. We must remember that every family in Israel ought properly to have possessed its hereditary estate, and in it the means to support life decently; and, further, that such a nation at first formed a compact unity and a close brotherhood, especially towards other races subjugated by it. We cannot, then, be surprised that the law, rather than suffer the pernicious usages which existed elsewhere, preferred trying to abolish all taking of interest whatever.

## David's Treatment of Moab.

2 SAMUEL viii. 2: 'And he smote Moab, and measured them with the line, making them to lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*How can such deliberate cruelty be reconciled with the commendation of David as a man after 'God's own heart'?*

**Answer.**—It is necessary first to know precisely what he did; then to estimate fairly the provocations under which he acted; and then to set his conduct alongside that of other conquerors of cities and peoples in his time and in Eastern lands.

David did with an Eastern quaintness what is nowadays done, and regarded as righteous doing, in connection with the mutinies of

regiments or rebellions of peoples. It is recognised as right that there should be some public and deliberate vindication of outraged authority and broken vows; and so, in a regiment, every tenth man is put to death; and, in a revolt, a certain determined proportion of rebels. The sentiment is that the lives of the entire regiment, or the members of the rebellion, are forfeited, and that it is a merciful limitation of strict justice to execute the few as representative of the whole.

David's act was precisely of this order; but, as he lived in the fierce Eastern climes, his merciful limitation of judgment did not go far enough to seem very gracious to us. He made his prisoners—and it is important to remember that these were soldiers in arms—lie close together on the ground; the space they occupied was measured off in three parts; and it is significantly said that those on a *full* third were spared. The cruelty is at once relieved when we see that the scheme bore no relation to the inhabitants, and has to be judged entirely according to the rules and customs of warfare.

It has been pointed out that the Mosaic rules, under which David was bound to act, were very severe; and that a man—a judge or a king—is not personally chargeable with cruelty when he firmly carries out the laws which all recognise as binding. The law of Moses had enjoined that if a city yielded when summoned, the lives of the inhabitants were to be spared, tribute being imposed on the community. If, however, it resisted, 'every male was to be put to death'; the women and children led off as slaves; the place sacked; and its cattle and all the plunder shared among the conquerors (Deut. xx). So, if it be assumed that the whole of the male inhabitants were made to lie on the ground, still, in sparing a 'full third,' David leaned to the side of mercy.

Goodness—in motive, spirit, and character—must be the same thing in every age and clime. But goodness, finding expression in conduct and relations, must vary with the sentiments, customs, and surroundings of particular times. To judge David's conduct aright, we must see him in the *setting of his age*, and not force him to go into a framing of our own age.

We do not actually know what provocations Moab had given David, but his dealing with them is certainly the punishment of some act of treachery. We know that he had been on such friendly terms with Moab as to seek in that country refuge from Saul, and a place of safety for his parents. It is a Jewish tradition that the King of Moab had broken the trust which David had reposed in him, and put to death the aged parents confided to his charge. Probably

Moab had treacherously taken advantage of David's temporary failure in his Syrian wars, and tried to cut off his retreat ; and so they must learn by such a terrible vengeance.

God's praise is of David's character as a *man*, and not of his precise conduct as a military leader or as an irresponsible Eastern king.

### ‘Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth.’

EXODUS xxi. 23-25 : ‘But if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.’

**Question.**—*Does not this stern rule support the idea that a man may take vengeance of his neighbour?*

**Answer.**—We are distinctly to understand that these are not directions for the ordering of private conduct and relations, but instructions to judges and magistrates as to principles on which their judgments should be made and their sentences given. They are, indeed, better suited for the tribal life of ancient Israel than to the city life of modern times ; but the principles of restitution, and of making a man suffer what he has wilfully made others suffer, are quite just in every generation and in every society.

It must be clearly seen that a lawgiver can only modify, and improve upon, the sentiments of justice which actually prevail among his people. He would wholly fail of his purpose if he introduced principles of justice and methods of judgment with which they were unfamiliar. Moses could qualify and adapt the prevailing tribal notions, especially in this respect—that he could moderate their fierceness and severity. It was a great work to take the avengement of wrong out of the hands of sufferers or their immediate friends, and put it into the hands of publicly appointed officials. These magistrates would have to work on the old lines, but in a calm and judicial spirit. ‘Eye for eye’ does but, with the figurativeness of Eastern language, express the principle that, as far as may be possible, reparation of all injuries wilfully done must be publicly demanded. This principle might healthily be made more prominent in the judicial decisions of modern times.

‘This law, of suffering like for like (the *jus talionis*), has its root in a simple conception of justice, and is found in the laws of many ancient nations. It was ascribed to Rhadamanthus ; it was recognised in the laws of Solon, by the ancient Indians, and by the Thurians. It appears to be regarded in this place as a maxim for

the magistrate in awarding the amount of compensation to be paid for the infliction of personal injury. The sum was to be as nearly as possible the worth in money of the power lost by the injured person. This view appears to be in accordance with Jewish tradition.’

(For further Scripture references see Gen. ix. 6 ; Lev. xxiv. 19-21 ; Deut. xix. 21.)

*Prof. Rawlinson*, in *Ellicott's Commentary*, says : ‘It is a reasonable conjecture that the law of retaliation was much older than Moses, and accepted by him as tolerable, rather than devised as rightful. The law itself was very widely spread. There is, *primâ facie*, a semblance of exact rectitude and equality about it which captivates rude minds, and causes the adoption of the rule generally in an early condition of society. Theoretically, retaliation is the exactest and strictest justice ; but in practice difficulties arise. How is the force of a blow to be measured ? How are exactly similar burns and wounds to be inflicted ? Is eye to be given for eye when the injurer is a one-eyed man ? And, again, is it expedient for law to multiply the number of mutilated citizens in a community ? Considerations of these kinds cause the rule to be discarded as soon as civilization reaches a certain point, and tend generally to the substitution of a money compensation, to be paid to the injured party by the injurer.’

*Cruikshank* says : ‘We have heard a slave argue for his emancipation on the score of the accidental loss of an eye in his master's service, from the recoil of a branch of a tree, and appeal to a traditional law which entitles him to this compensation.’

‘It is a curious illustration of the decayed sentiment prevailing in the time of our Lord, that the Pharisees had invented a scale of money payments in lieu of the sufferings enjoined by the law. As in our own Middle Ages, a tariff of fines was constructed for each personal injury—for tearing the hair, for a cuff on the ear, a blow on the back, spitting on the person, taking away an under-garment, uncovering the head, and the like. The value of a hand, or foot, or an eye was computed by the depreciation it would have made in the value of a slave. A blow on the ear was variously set at the fine of a shilling or a pound ; a blow on the one cheek, at two hundred zuzes ; on both cheeks, at double. To tear out hair, to spit on the person, to take away one's coat, or to uncover a woman's head, was compensated by a fine of four hundred zuzes.’

## Jephthah's Argument.

JUDGES xi. 24 : 'Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God hath dispossessed from before us, them will we possess.'

**Difficulty.**—*Do not the words of Jephthah imply a recognition of equality between Chemosh and Jehovah; or, at least, assume Chemosh to be a real God?*

**Explanation.**—In order to argue a disputed point fairly, the disputants must have a common platform. It is often necessary to assume an agreement, and the one arguer must, for the sake of argument, accept temporarily the other's position. This is just what we have before us in this passage. Jephthah is not arguing the relative claims of Chemosh and Jehovah, but, for the occasion, accepting the fact that the national gods bless national enterprise, he fairly enough urges that the King of Ammon would have held fast his right to all territory Chemosh had given him upon conquest, and what he claimed for himself he must allow to Israel; for Jehovah, Israel's God, had given to them the territory now in dispute. Jephthah's opinion of Chemosh, whatever it might be, would on this occasion have been out of place, and even offensive.

But this explanation will appear more satisfactory if the details of a somewhat unfamiliar story are given.

It seems that a certain portion of Gilead—that bounded by the Arnon on the south, by the Jabbok on the north, by the Jordan on the west, and by the wilderness on the east, and forming the territories of Reuben and Gad—had in some far-distant time belonged to Moab. Before Israel had anything to do with it, Sihon, King of the Amorites, had conquered it and made it a part of his kingdom. Now the Israelites were commanded not to take any territory of the Moabites and Ammonites, but they were to extirpate, and take the lands of, all Canaanites and Amorites. They could enter into no disputes about the absolutely original owners of the soil, and, finding this particular territory under the rule of Sihon, they were justified in conquering and appropriating it.

About the time of Jephthah the power of the Ammonites and Moabites had increased under some vigorous rulers, and the Israelites east of Jordan were fast sinking into mere roving shepherds. This was a good opportunity for asserting claims to the lands occupied by Gad and Reuben, and following such claims up by warlike enterprises. In the emergency, Jephthah was sought for as the most likely leader

f a movement to resist the encroachment. Jephthah takes no place among good and God-fearing men, and we should not think for a moment of taking religion from him, or allowing him to express for his right religious beliefs. He was the wild leader of a band of rough men who, living on the border-land, had proved his prowess in some petty conflicts with the Ammonites. When called to head a more general movement of the Israelites, he began with an effort to settle the dispute about the territory by peaceful negotiations. Answering the Ammonite king, who declared the disputed land was his, Jephthah sets the following arguments : 1. The territory was not, in fact, taken either from Moab or Ammon, but from Sihon, King of the Amorites. This was proved by appeal to the historic records preserved in the book of Deuteronomy. 2. It is universally recognised that purchase from the last owner, and conquest from the last possessor, gives equitable rights. 3. Length of possession gives competent title. And

Balak, who lived nearer the time of conquest, and was a powerful king, did not venture to dispute the right of possession ; and it was unreasonable to revive obsolete claims now. The worst that need be said of Jephthah is given in the following sentences by *Dr. Geikie* : 'Contact with Moab and Ammon, and the worship of their sanguinary gods along with Jehovah, or in His stead, had given Jephthah a creed in which zeal for God was darkly mingled with heathen ideas borrowed from the rights of Chemosh, whom he seems to have recognised in some sense a true divinity.'

## Human Appeals to Conscious Integrity.

PSALM xxvi. 1 : 'Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity : I have trusted also in the Lord without wavering.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Can a man know 'the plague of his own heart,' and yet, with a true humility and sincerity, speak to God of his personal integrity ?*

**Answer.**—If a man is consciously sincere, and fully purposed to serve God, he may, and he ought to say so to God, on fitting occasions. Difficulty is created in this case, by our adding to the word 'integrity' ideas which are in no sense essential to it. Integrity simply 'wholeness of purpose and intention' ; 'genuineness' ; 'soundness.' The man of integrity is the vessel without a crack, that will ring clear. The word *integrity* does not mean 'moral perfection,' for *that* no man in his senses can claim ; and to ask God to judge us on that basis is to invite a certain condemnation. Integrity means uprightness of heart, soundness of purpose, conscious

sincerity of intention. The idea of the word may be illustrated by the description given of Job, who was 'perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil.' *Perfect* here meaning 'single hearted,' 'simple,' 'not wilfully or consciously committing sin.' *Upright* describes the general tone and character of Job's relation with his fellow-men.

The dictionaries give the word as derived from the Latin *integritas*, and meaning 'state of being entire or complete; wholeness; moral soundness; honesty; uprightness; unimpaired or genuine state of purity; incorruptness.'

But it does seem strange to us that David should thus stand before God, and appeal to what he calls his 'righteousness' and his 'integrity.' It is usually regarded as a self-evident and foundational truth, that man has no righteousness of his own. The best things in man are bad. 'All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we are all as an unclean thing.' But however efficient as representing one side of truth, this is only one side; and we should be able also to recognise that there is some good sense in which a man can be said to have a personal righteousness before God. We have actually known and lived with persons of whom we always think and speak as men and women of integrity, right-hearted, sincere, and righteous. Our Lord distinctly assumed that men could have a personal righteousness, when He said, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees ye can in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

It may, however, be said that David miserably failed from righteousness. He did; and yet there is the most marked distinction between his failure and that of King Saul. Saul failed altogether, and fell away from God, because his sins were sins of *will*; neither heart nor life were right in the sight of God. David stumbled, but did not utterly fall, because the *will* in him was only forced to consent to sin, and sprung back to God directly the force of bodily passion that held it down was removed. David failed in the body-sphere; but Saul failed in the soul-sphere.

*Jennings and Lowe* take a different view. 'The most prominent feature in this Psalm is the writer's confidence in his own piety. Such self-confidence is eminently characteristic of the Hebrew religion. Its assertion will be repugnant only to those who expect the Hebrew poets to write in accordance with the higher teaching of Christianity.'

## The Destruction of Amalek.

1 SAMUEL xv. 2, 3: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'

**Difficulty.**—*Can such a command have been given by Him whom we know as 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness'?*

**Explanation.**—There is, perhaps, no difficulty in God's Word more perplexing than this one, and the best that can be said about it will not do more than relieve the strain upon our feeling in relation to it. From present-day points of view, and in the light of modern knowledge and sentiment, it is nearly impossible to vindicate the ways of God with Amalek. But we are bound to read the story, not in the light of modern days, but according to the prevailing sentiments and practices of the age when such events occurred. The total destruction of tribes and races was *then* a commonplace, now it is such a horrible idea that it could not be endured in connection with any civilized community.

The best suggestion of explanation perhaps is, that God occupied the place, in relation to Israel, of supreme King, actually presiding over national affairs. We have had occasion to show that Scripture often represents God as speaking and acting like a *man*; we should further see that He is often represented as speaking and acting like a *king*, and, as the only kings Eastern people knew were irresponsible kings, even *like such a king*. If the Israelites thought of God as their King, they could only think Him such a King as those they were familiar with in the nations around.

Now, as matter of diplomacy, kings had often to reserve the vengeance of national insults until the fitting opportunity arrived, and so Jehovah delayed the vindication of His people from the insults of Amalek. And we should also notice that the Eastern notion of *blood-revenge*, which required the death of the murderer or insulter, when applied to nations involved the death or total destruction of the guilty *race*. In case of blood-feud the extermination of a tribe matches the death of the individual; and the justice which approved such death of the individual for individual sin could not reasonably object to the destruction of a race, or tribe, for united tribal or national sin. Whatever had been done by Amalek was done by it *as a people*, and upon Jehovah, Israel's King, rested the duty of avenging the wrong.

In this direction a hopeful explanation is possible, but the further suggestions of prominent and judicious commentators may be given.

The people of Amalek roamed freely through the deserts which lie between Southern Judæa and the Egyptian frontier. As a race allied to the Israelites, that people ought to have had nothing to fear from them; but, in a most dastardly and treacherous way, the Amalekites had attacked the rear-guard of Israel, as the host was toilsomely climbing up the passes toward Sinai. On that occasion they were indeed defeated and driven back, but for this cowardly unprovoked attack they were solemnly doomed to destruction (Exod. xvii. 8, 14; Num. xxiv. 20).

*Canon Spence* regards Amalek as *cherem*, or *put under the ban*. 'Whatever was "put under the ban" in Israel was devoted to God, and whatever so devoted could not be redeemed, but must be slain. Amalek was to be looked on as accursed; human beings and cattle must be killed; whatever was capable of being destroyed by fire must be burnt. The cup of iniquity in this people was filled up. Its national existence, if prolonged, would simply have worked mischief to the commonwealth of nations. Israel here was simply the instrument of destruction used by the Almighty. It is vain to attempt in this and similar transactions to find materials for the blame or for the praise of Israel. We must never forget that Israel stood in a peculiar relation to the unseen King, and that this nation was not unfrequently used as the visible scourge by which the Almighty Wise punished hopelessly hardened sinners, and deprived them the power of working mischief. We might as well find fault with pestilence and famine, or the sword—those awful instruments of Divine justice, and, though we often fail to see it now, of Divine mercy.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* suggests that this expedition by Saul against Amalek was not made without fresh provocation, and refers to chapter xiv. 48: 'Probably some incursion was made, similar to that described in chapter xxx., upon the south country at a time when they thought the Israelites were weakened by their contest with the Philistines, since they are described as "those that spoiled Israel."'

*Dr. Edersheim* says: 'Looking back upon it from another stage of moral development and religious dispensation, and in circumstances so different that such questions and duties can never arise, and though they seem immeasurably far behind, as the dark valley to the traveller who has climbed the sunlit height, or as perhaps even the earlier and phases in our own early history, many things connected with

e "ban" may appear mysterious to us. This accommodation of the law to each stage of man's moral state, together with the continuous moral advancement which the law as a schoolmaster was intended to bring about, and which in turn was met by progressive revelation, renders it impossible to judge of a Divine command by trying to put it as to our own times, and as applicable to us. If we take forward the finger-hand on the dial of time and the clock still strikes the old hour, we must not infer that the clock is out of order, but rather that we have unskillfully meddled with it.'

*Jamieson* gives a succinct, and practically efficient, explanation in the following note: 'Being a people of nomadic habits, they were plundering and dangerous as the Bedouin Arabs, particularly to the southern tribes. The national interest required, and God, as *King of Israel*, decreed, that this public enemy should be removed.'

### Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

EXODUS iv. 21: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest back into Egypt, see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in thine hand; but I will harden his heart, and he will not let the people go.'

**Question.**—*Did not this hardening of the heart, by making Pharaoh insensible to good influences, remove his responsibility?*

**Answer.**—This is the first mention of the hardening, and it should be carefully noticed that it is in the nature of a prophecy. In order to prepare Moses for the difficulties and seeming failures that will attend his mission, God gives him an anticipatory view of the providential order, and shows him what will presently happen in the regular course of events. Moses quite understood that God did not harden Pharaoh's heart *to begin with*. The hardening came about as the usual and providential judgment on persistent self-willedness; and Moses is told about it beforehand, so that he may be able wisely to meet the circumstances to which the hardening may lead.

We find it difficult to realize what, in fact, is a very simple thing, that God's foreknowing what will happen does not add anything to the ordinary course of cause and effect. God overlooks all, and knows the end from the beginning. He can tell how men will act in every complicated situation in life. But God's *knowledge* is not one of the agencies which influence men's actions. He may be pleased to show Moses what Pharaoh would presently do, and what, in response to Pharaoh's self-willedness, He would have to do; but the regular course of affairs would go on, unaffected either by what God knew or by what He was pleased to tell Moses.

This appears to be a sufficient answer and explanation, but we may add others which have commended themselves to honoured writers.

The fullest and most careful examination of this subject that we have met with is given by *Bishop Wordsworth*, and we present the explanation to our readers first, because it supports, and harmonizes with, the view we have already taken. *Wordsworth* paraphrases the verse 21 thus: 'Because he will, as I well know, resist all My counsel and defy My power, and sin against My reproofs and chastisement; and will reject all My warnings, and turn My spiritual food into poison and My grace into licentiousness, therefore I will punish him by withdrawing My grace from him, and by giving him over to a reprobate mind.' To *Theodoret* is due the familiar figure 'that as the same heat of the same sun moistens wax and hardens clay, so the same grace of the same God has the effect of softening some and hardening others, according to the temper of their hearts.'

It appears that three distinct Hebrew words are translated, in the Scripture narrative, by the one word 'hardened.' (1) *Chazak*, which signifies actively, *to bind together*. (2) *Cabad*, to be heavy; and, in the hiphil form, to make heavy; to resist sullenly, with proud and stupid obstinacy. (3) *Kashah*, to be hard, and to make hard. The following table is given as exhibiting the process of obduracy in the case of Pharaoh:

<i>Prophecy.</i>	<i>Chazak</i> ,	Ex.	iv.	21.	'I will harden his heart.'
"	<i>Kashah</i> ,	"	vii.	3.	'I will harden Pharaoh's heart.'
<i>History.</i>	<i>Chazak</i> ,	"	vii.	13.	Literally, as <i>Sept.</i> and <i>Vulg.</i> , 'Pharaoh's heart resisted.'
"	<i>Cabad</i> ,	"	vii.	14.	'Pharaoh's heart is hardened.'
"	<i>Chazak</i> ,	"	vii.	22.	'Pharaoh's heart was hardened.'
"	<i>Cabad</i> ,	"	viii.	15.	'Pharaoh hardened his heart.'
"	<i>Chazak</i> ,	"	viii.	19.	'Pharaoh's heart was hardened.'
"	<i>Cabad</i> ,	"	viii.	32.	'Pharaoh hardened his heart.'
"	<i>Cabad</i> ,	"	ix.	7.	'Pharaoh's heart was hardened.'

Thus, then, it appears that it is said *seven* times that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, or that Pharaoh hardened his heart. And *not till then* is it said that—

*Chazak*, Ex. ix. 12. 'The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.'

But this was not till he had been abandoned even by his own magicians, so that his obduracy was now most wilful.

*Cabad*, Ex. ix. 34. 'He (Pharaoh) hardened his heart.'

*Chazak*, " ix. 35. 'The heart of Pharaoh was hardened.'

*Cabad*, " x. 1. 'The Lord said, I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants.'

But even then he might have repented, for his servants did repent (see ch. x. 7).

Pharaoh would not repent: and then came the heavier aggravation

Divine judgment; and it is observable that it is now said four times (with the stronger word *Chazak*), 'The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart' (see ch. x. 20, 27; xi. 10; xiv. 8). Pharaoh's will was therefore free. God's foreknowledge had no constraining influence on Pharaoh's conduct towards God, but had a directing influence on God's conduct and language towards him. God's foreknowledge does not *cause anything to be*, no more than man's remembrance *causes anything to have been*.

The *Speaker's Commentary* remarks that 'Calamities which do not subdue the heart harden it. The hardening itself is judicial and just, when it is a consequence of previously formed habits. The reason why the action of God, rather than the character of Pharaoh, dwelt on in this passage would seem to be that it was necessary to sustain the spirit of Moses and the people during the process of events, which they were thus taught were altogether foreseen and redetermined by God.'

*Francis Jacox*, in his *Secular Annotations*, ii. 238, gives some interesting illustrations. 'It is written that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and this again and again; as well as, and we may be sure to all intents and purposes antecedently to, the fact that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh would have it so. Judicial blindness set in after a time; but first there had been cause shown in Heaven's hancery court. The infatuation was beyond remedy. The ossification of the heart involved in its progress and development paralysis of the brain. Dementation was now the precursor of perdition.'

'It is those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge that are said by the apostle to be by God given over to a reprobate mind. It is of those who distinctly and emphatically have pleasure in unrighteousness that he says, 'And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie,' which dementation should involve their doom. They grope in the dark without light, and He maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.'

"For wicked ears are deaf to wisdom's call,  
And vengeance strikes whom Heaven has doomed to fall,"

says the Homeric Odysseus; and again—

"For Zeus infatuates all, and all believe a lie."

And in another place we see Athene,

"Cloud with intellectual gloom  
The suitors' soul, insensate of their doom."

In the "Iliad" again, we have the Trojans given over to welcome fatal counsel.

"The shouting host in loud applauses joined,  
 So Pallas robbed the many of their mind ;  
 To their own sense condemned ! and left to choose  
 The worst advice, the better to refuse."

'Cicero, in his account to the people of Rome of the Catiline conspiracy, alleged that the conspirators must needs be under a divine and judicial infatuation, and could never have acted as they had done if the gods had not confounded their senses.

'It is with a sort of rage at the inaptitude of King James II (of England) that his sometime adherent, Colonel Esmond, thinks of his melancholy story. "Do the Fates deal more specially with kings than with common men? One is apt to imagine so, in considering the history of that royal race, in whose behalf so much fidelity, so much valour, so much blood were desperately and bootlessly expended."

'To another class of reprobate minds apply Sir Henry Taylor's lines, the truth of which is signally enforced by every police court register and Newgate Calendar :

"That Providence, which makes the good take heed  
 To safety and success, contrariwise  
 Makes villains mostly reckless. Look on life,  
 And you will see the crimes of blackest dye  
 So clumsily committed, by such sots,  
 So lost to thought, so scant of circumspection,  
 As shall constrain you to pronounce that guilt  
 Bedarkens and confounds the mind of man.  
 Human intelligence, on murders bent,  
 Becomes a midnight fumbler ; human will,  
 Of God abandoned, in its web of snares  
 Strangles its own intent."

*Prof. Rawlinson*, in his recent work on 'Egypt and Babylon' gives an estimate of the character of Menephthah, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, which materially helps us towards the understanding of the Scripture narrative. 'He is an oppressor as merciless as either of his predecessors, as deaf to pity, as determined to crush the aspiration of the Hebrews by hard labour. To this harshness and cruelty of temper he adds a remarkable weakness and vacillation. He seems to have been deficient in personal courage, and grossly and abnormally superstitious.'

*M. Lenormant* begins his account of Menephthah by observing 'Moreover, he was neither a soldier nor an administrator, but one whose mind was turned almost exclusively towards the chimeras of sorcery and magic, resembling in this respect his brother, Kha-m-uas. The book of Exodus is in the most exact agreement with historical truth when it depicts him as surrounded by priest-magicians, with

whom Moses contends in working prodigies, in order to affect the mind of Pharaoh.'

The Egyptian monuments confirm three leading features in the character of Menephthah,—his superstitiousness, his want of courage, and his weak, shift, false temper. Weak men are often hopelessly stupid and stubborn at times; and it is a common mistake of such men to mistake *stubbornness* for *strength*.

The explanation of Pharaoh's hardened heart may be summed up in a brief sentence. 'God did not make Pharaoh sin, but He had to punish him for it. From righteous retribution for obdurate impenitence there is no escape.'

'Aye! when thou hast drained a swallow's milk, and  
Seen rocks bear olive nuts, the sand pomegranates yield,  
A harder task to try thy vaunted force remains—  
To shield a wicked man from retribution's pains.'

*From an Oriental Poem.*

## Laws concerning the Ammonite and Moabite.

DEUTERONOMY xxiii. 3, 6: 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of the Lord for ever. . . . Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.'

**Difficulty.**—*Does not such an injunction give the Divine sanction to a spirit of hatred and revenge?*

**Explanation.**—We may not put our limitations on the forms that Divine judgment may take. The continuous enmity of a neighbouring race was the form which the Divine judgment on Ammon and Moab took. Viewed from this side, no difficulty is created. But it may be asked whether the influence of such cherished enmity by Israel was not injurious to it, as nourishing evil sentiments and feelings. In reply, it may be urged that the enmity was public and national, and in no way private and personal. We can best represent the distinction by calling to mind the English sentiment concerning the French three-quarters of a century ago. Publicly nation hated nation; but privately and individually mutual kindnesses were shown. Race hatreds must be distinguished from personal hatreds; and these race hatreds have an important influence on the movements, relations, uprisings and downfallings, of nations. The evil of revenge comes out when it is the feeling animating individual against individual. Race feeling concerns an ideal, not a person.

*Saalschutz*, quoted in 'Speaker's Commentary,' remarks that this law forbids only the naturalization of those against whom it is directed. It does not forbid their dwelling in the land; and seems to refer

rather to the nations than to individuals. It was not understood, at any rate, to interdict marriage with a Moabitess.'

Further indications of the relations in which Israel should stand to the Moabites and Ammonites are given in Deut. ii. 9, 19: 'Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle. . . . When thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them.' So we understand that the injunctions given amount to this only: Keep separate from Moab and Ammon; do not in any way interfere with them, and do not let them in any way interfere with you. It must, however, be recognised that subsequent events greatly embittered the race relations.

*Jamieson* explains the passage, and the connection in which it stands, thus: 'To "enter into the congregation of the Lord" means either admission to public honours and offices in the Church and State of Israel, or, in the case of foreigners, incorporation with that nation by marriage. The rule was, that strangers and foreigners, for fear of friendship or marriage connections with them leading the people into idolatry, were not admissible till their conversion to the Jewish rule. But some parts were excluded from the full rights and privileges of citizenship. Among these were Ammonites and Moabites—for without provocation they combined to engage a soothsayer to curse the Israelites, and further endeavoured, by ensnaring them into the guilt and licentious abominations of idolatry, to seduce them from their allegiance to God, and thereby make them forfeit the privileges of their national covenant. The offence of the Ammonites and Moabites was an aggravated one. It was not only a denial of common hospitality and kindness to strangers and pilgrims, but it was a scheme of premeditated villainy, indicating deep malice and inextinguishable hatred. Their exclusion, therefore, as avowed public enemies, was perpetual and immutable.'

### The Sin of Numbering the People.

2 SAMUEL xxiv. 1: 'And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, saying, Go, number Israel and Judah.'

1 CHRONICLES xxi. 1: 'And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.'

**Difficulty.**—*Which account of the source of the suggestion to number the people is to be accepted; and why, if taking census was right at other times, was it wrong on this particular occasion?*

**Explanation.**—It is necessary first to be sure of the precise renderings of these two verses, and then to remember that we have in them the personal opinion and judgment of two different historians

of the same events: and the statements should be compared as opinions, and not as inspired explanations of the true causes. We can accept the facts, and use our own judgments on the opinions, testing the explanations offered by the general principles and truths revealed in the Scripture. We need not assume that the Divine inspiration ensures the absolute correctness of historians' sentiments and reflections. The fact that these two opinions so vitally differ suggests that we may choose between them, or form a sounder and more Scriptural judgment respecting the matter, in dependence on the leading and teaching of God's Holy Spirit.

The word *Satan* would have been more correctly translated *an adversary*; and the sentence in Samuel would be more correctly rendered, 'One moved David against them.' The simple historical fact seems to be that one of the courtiers pressed this evil advice on the king; and the Bible writers properly see in such a man a tempter, an adversary, a Satan; and they as properly recognise, in all the consequences that follow, the outworking of Divine judgments. In this instance the *adversary* is treated as a Divine agency used for the testing of God's people by temptation to sin. If we fully accept the idea of the Divine education and training of men, it will be no difficulty to us that times of moral trial should be found, and subjection to evil enticements should form part of the Divine plan. We know that God tries and tests us by *things*, and it should not be difficult for us to realize that He may try and test us by *persons*. This is, indeed, our most subtle and most severe form of testing.

We may not separate any of the things happening to us in life from the Divine purpose and overruling. What we call evil is properly seen as part of the Divine agency for our moral culture. Divine overrulings do not change the *character* or *quality* of things, but they directly affect the *result* of things. All life is probation. We are being moulded in righteousness. So we find that even these strange Satanic temptations serve gracious Divine purposes in the individual man; and when we cannot see this, we may see that they serve gracious Divine purposes in the warning and teaching of others, and that some of us may even, as David, stumble unto falling, *vicariously*.

The narrative does not clearly and explicitly state what David's idea was in thus commanding a census to be made. Probably he desired to know the numbers of the people of his kingdom, as it had been extended by successful war; but this he wished rather for his own self-glorying than for national purposes. It was an act of self-will, and it failed from full loyalty to the theocratic idea, which had

been so well maintained during David's reign. In just *this* lay its sin and mischief. *Dean Stanley* calls the taking of this census 'an attempt not unnaturally suggested by the increase of his power, but implying a confidence and pride alien to the spirit inculcated on the kings of the chosen people. The apprehension of a Nemesis on any overweening display of prosperity, if not consistent with the highest revelations of the Divine nature in the Gospel, pervades all ancient, especially all Oriental, religions.' And *Ewald* says: 'The only satisfactory explanation of this measure is that it was intended as the foundation of an organized and vigorous government, like that of Egypt or Phœnicia, under which the exact number of the houses and inhabitants of every city and village would have to be obtained, so as to be able to summon the people for general taxation. But it is well known what a profound aversion and what an instinctive abhorrence certain nations, ancient and modern, harbour against any such design, which they dimly suspect, not perhaps without good reason, is likely to result in a dangerous extension of the governing power, and its encroachment on the sanctity of the private home.'

Why God's wrath was kindled against the nation at this particular time is not told us, but the most reasonable supposition is, that it was connected with the national share in the rebellion of Absalom. And the suggestions of the court-officer, who in effect became an adversary, may very well have been that it was absolutely necessary to get the kingdom organized, and properly under control, so as to prevent such a surprise as had been effected by Absalom.

The mere taking of a census could not be in itself a wrong, since it was even required (Exod. xxx. 12). See also Num. 1; xxvi.

As illustrative of the sentiment that still prevails respecting an official numbering of the people, *Van Lennep* says that no census, properly speaking, is ever taken in the East, but the taxes are assessed upon the households. A record is kept of all who have reached the age of eighteen, and are, therefore, deemed capable of bearing arms; they are often spoken of as so many guns or muskets.

### Solomon's Marriage to Pharaoh's Daughter.

1 KINGS iii. 1: 'And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David.'

**Difficulty.**—*How could a king of Israel marry an Egyptian princess without violating a fundamental law of the Mosaic economy, and bringing on himself the judgment of God?*

**Explanation.**—It is customary to reply to this question that Solomon required the princess to become a proselyte to Mosaism,

and that in this way he avoided the application to himself of the Mosaic rule. In support of this view it is contended that he is never reproved for this alliance; that among the idolatries introduced during his later reign there is no trace of the Egyptian system; and that the expression used in Psalm xlv. 10 seems to indicate that this princess did change her religion.

On the other side may be urged that Solomon had married an Ammonitess woman before this, one Naamah (see 1 Kings xi. 42; xiv. 21; 2 Chron. xii. 13), who became the mother of Rehoboam. It therefore seems necessary to inquire whether we have properly understood the applications, and limitations of application, of the Mosaic rule. It will be well for us to have the passages embodying the law fully before us.

Exodus xxxiv. 12, 16, reads as follows in the Revised Version: 'Take heed to thyself lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest . . . and thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a-whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a-whoring after their gods.' So far as this passage is concerned, the objection is clearly to the races occupying Canaan at the time of the Israelite invasion, and to them alone. This command does not, even by inference, exclude marriage with the women of distant and separate nations. It is designed to prevent a certain particular form of evil—the subtle introduction of that Canaanite idolatry, against which, in all its forms, the severest judgments of God were denounced.

Deuteronomy vii. 1, 3, reads thus: 'When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before thee, the Hittite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, seven nations greater and mightier than thou . . . thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son; nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.' It is evident that the rule, as expressed in this passage, is as strictly limited to the Canaanite races of Palestine as was the former passage. Neither gives us any comprehensive rule applicable to all other nations: both deal entirely with the degraded races who at one particular period occupied Canaan.

Then, if we look at the actual history of the Jewish race, we shall find no such strict law of marriage limitation within the race as we have imagined to exist. Joseph, without rebuke, married a daughter of Potipherah (Gen. xli 45). Moses married a wife of Midian

(Exod. ii. 21), and possibly a second wife of Ethiopia (Num. xii. 1). He is, indeed, for this reproached by Miriam and Aaron; but their objection lay against the influence of the woman, and not against the fact that she was a Cushite. (We think the person referred to was Zipporah, Moses' only wife, who was an Arabian Cushite.) Salmon married Rahab of Jericho, and Boaz married Ruth of Moab. David seems to have felt free to ally himself thus with his neighbouring kingdoms.

There is, indeed, a specific permission of alliance with distant nations in marriage, which has been too little noticed. In Deut. xx. 10-14 are found instructions as to what Israel should do when they are called to besiege and take the city of an enemy: 'When the Lord shall deliver it into thine hand, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword; but the *women*, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take for a prey unto thyself.' And then it is significantly added: 'Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are *not of the cities of these nations*. But of the cities of these peoples . . . thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth.'

It does not appear, therefore, that Solomon broke any Mosaic law by marrying Egyptian or other princesses. The complaint made in his later years is not of his marrying the wives, but of his giving way to the evil influence of the wives.

If careful attention be paid to the distress of the returned captives, for whom Ezra sought to legislate (Ezra x. 1-10), it will be seen that it was not occasioned by their marrying strange or foreign women, but by their marrying women *of the people of the land*; this being recognised as the precise limit of the Mosaic prohibition.

The only other passage to which we need refer is Nehemiah xiii. 26. Nehemiah, translating freely the term 'people of the land,' assumed the prohibition to include the women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; but there is no authority for his particular recognition of the sphere of the law. And when referring to Solomon, Nehemiah's point is that these foreign wives proved a snare to Solomon: they 'caused him to sin.'

On the whole, it seems safe to assert that neither rule nor custom made Solomon's marriage to the Egyptian princess a forbidden thing, and that we have failed to observe the very precise limitation of the marriage injunctions given by Jehovah to His people.

While treating of this subject we may add the *Rev. George Rawlinson's* latest note on the identification of this princess: 'There is

nothing surprising in the willingness of a Pharaoh of the twenty-first dynasty to give a daughter in marriage to the foreign monarch of a neighbouring country. Even in the most flourishing times the kings of Egypt had been willing to form matrimonial alliances with the Ethiopian royal house, and had both taken Ethiopian princesses for their own wives, and given their daughters in marriage to Ethiopian monarchs. The last king of the twentieth dynasty married a "princess of Baktan," a Syrian or Mesopotamian; and even the great Rameses married a Hittite. According to 1 Chronicles iv. 18, there was one Pharaoh who allowed a daughter of his to marry a mere ordinary Israelite. To "make affinity" with a prince of Solomon's rank and position would have been beneath the dignity of few Egyptian monarchs; it was probably felt as a highly satisfactory connection by the weak Tanite Pharaoh, whose daughter made so good a match.

'With which of the Tanite monarchs it was that Solomon thus allied himself is uncertain. M. Lenormant fixes definitely on Hor-Pasebensha, or Pasebensha II., the last king of the dynasty; but an earlier monarch is more probable. Solomon's marriage was early in his reign (1 Kings iii. 1), and he reigned forty years (ch. xi. 42), during the last five or ten of which he would seem to have been contemporary with Shishak (ch. xi. 40). When he ascended the throne, the king who reigned in Egypt was probably either Pasebensha I. or Pinetem II. Unfortunately, these monarchs have left such scanty remains that we know next to nothing concerning them.'

## The Right and the Wrong of making Vows.

1 SAMUEL i. ii. : 'And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.'

**Question.**—*Since a vow is a making of terms and conditions with God, can it ever be becoming to a dependent creature?*

**Answer.**—Vows are wholly unsuitable under the present Christian revelation; but they formed a fitting part of a system which promised material and temporal rewards to obedience and virtue. The Divine acceptance of vows implies Divine condescension to the imperfect sentiments of an age.

It has been remarked that vows are characteristic of this particular age of the Judges. Samson and Samuel were put under the Nazarite vow; oath was taken in the Benjamite war (Jud. xxi. 5); Jephthah made vow (Jud. xi. 30); so did Hannah; and so did Saul (1 Sam.

xiv. 24). According to the law given in Numbers xxx. 6-8, a wife had no right to make a vow of such a nature as Hannah's without the concurrence of her husband ; and if it were made, he might disallow it if it did not meet with his approval.

In the case of 'vows' we observe the same principle working which applies to blood-revenge, domestic slavery, practice of retaliation, etc. None of these things are original in the Mosaic institutions ; they are all previously existing customs, which could not wisely be resisted, and so were taken up into the Mosaic system, modified, and adapted to new national conditions. So they all represent, as they appear among the Jews, a compromise adopted because the absolute best could not at the time be attained. It is very important that we should bear this in mind. For the hardness of the people's hearts Moses suffered a great many things which he could not fully approve.

'The practice of making vows—that is, of incurring voluntary obligations to the Deity on fulfilment of certain conditions, such as deliverance from death and danger, success in enterprises, and the like—is of extremely ancient date, and common in all systems of religion. The earliest Bible mention of a vow is that of Jacob.' 'The Law, therefore, did not introduce, it only regulated, the practice of vows.'

*Dean Stanley* refers to the frequent use of vows as falling in with the wild usages of the time of the Judges, and as having a direct affinity with Phœnician customs. 'One memorable instance of a Phœnician vow has been handed down to us, so solemn in its origin, so grand in its consequences, that even the vows of the most sacred ages may well bear comparison with it. The impulse from his early oath, which nerved the courage and patriotism of Hannibal from childhood to age in his warfare against Rome, may fitly be taken as an illustration of the feeling which, in its highest and noblest forms, led to the consecration of Samson and Samuel, and, in its unauthorized excesses, to the rash vows of the whole nation against the tribe of Benjamin, of Jephthah against his daughter, of Saul against Jonathan. These spasmodic efforts after self-restraint are precisely what we should expect in an age which had no other mode of steady-ing its purposes amidst the general anarchy in which it was enveloped ; and accordingly in that age they first appear, and within its limits expire.'

It is only as 'efforts after self-restraint' that we can regard them as ever acceptable to God. They are private covenants, in which a man gets for himself the moral help of being *under a pledge* ; but his need

getting such a moral help always implies a certain consciousness of moral weakness. The Christian ought not to need any such bolstering up of his purposes and endeavours; it should be enough for him that 'he can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth him.'

### Counsels of Deception.

1 SAMUEL xvi. 2: 'And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*Can such a direction to deceive possibly have been given by One who is spoken of as 'a God of truth and without iniquity?'*

**Explanation.**—Samuel had to deal with a man who was virtually insane, and the ordinary rules of straightforward dealing cannot be applied to such persons. Their foibles must be met, and every effort must be made to avoid irritating them. Saul, at this time, was in a most depressed and suspicious mood. His mind was quite off the balance, and it was necessary to treat him in such a way as not to excite his mania. From God's merciful treatment of the insane, we cannot reasonably take up a reproach against Him, or find models for our relations with people who are in their right minds.

Samuel could honourably adopt a device which sufficiently explained his movements, and kept back inquiries as to his more secret purposes. He could fairly take precautions for his own life. And the device suggested was one so simple that no one could possibly be injured by carrying it out. Properly and precisely speaking, no one was *deceived* by it; all that it did was, check inquiry and suspicion. As we can clearly see that such an innocent adaptation to circumstances would be quite consistent and proper in a truth-loving man, and would only be regarded as a sign of practical wisdom, we ought not to find any difficulty in admitting that such a suggestion might come from the truthful God. So long as men of various infirmity and ignorance have to come into earthly relations, such wise adjustments will be necessary. There are times to *hide* as well as times to *reveal*.

'The jealous suspicion of Saul watched the prophet so closely that he could only venture to go to David's town driving a heifer before him, as if his errand had been to sacrifice.'

Some writers look upon this appeal of Samuel to God as a sign of his human infirmity. Since God had sent him on this mission, he might have been quite sure that He would protect him in its execution.

The 'Speaker's Commentary' explains the appearance of duplicity sanctioned by Divine authority, and shows that it 'was the purpose of God that David should be anointed at this time as Saul's successor and as the ancestor and type of His Christ. It was not the purpose of God that Samuel should stir up a civil war by setting up David as Saul's rival. *Secrecy*, therefore, was a necessary part of the transaction. But *secrecy* and *concealment* are not the same as *duplicity* and *falsehood*. Concealment of a good purpose, for a good purpose, is clearly justifiable—*e.g.*, in war, in medical treatment, in State policy, and in the ordinary affairs of life. In the Providential government of the world and in God's dealings with individuals, concealment of His purpose till the proper time for its development, is the rule rather than the exception, and must be so. There is, therefore, nothing in the least inconsistent with *truth* in the occurrence here related.'

*Kitto* mentions that some Jewish writers explain the taking of the heifer for sacrifice by supposing that there had been a man slain in the neighbourhood, and that as it was not known by whom the crime had been committed, Samuel, to whom such a case would naturally be referred, went to sacrifice a heifer according to the law as laid down in Deuteronomy xxi.

## The Command to vex the Midianites.

NUMBERS xxv. 17, 18: 'Vex the Midianites, and smite them; for they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Beor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of the prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain on the day of the plague in the matter of Peor.'

**Difficulty.**—*This appears to be a Divine commendation of the principle of 'returning evil for evil,' which our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to regard as a wicked and mischievous principle.*

**Explanation.**—It is necessary to distinguish between a principle which is of universal application to individuals, and the relations of individuals, and a principle which may be temporarily set aside in public and national relations, under sufficiently important considerations; and if we are fairly to judge what are adequate considerations we must carefully estimate the customs and sentiments of the age in which it is judged right to set the general principle aside.

In the case now before us, Moses had, under the Divine direction to deal with a matter of singular difficulty. Unable to hinder the Israelites from advancing towards Canaan, the Moabites and Midianites united to corrupt the people of Israel by enticing the men to attend the lascivious feasts and sacrifices of their national gods, hoping thereby to bring down on Israel the crushing judgments

Jehovah. It was a very subtle and very dangerous scheme, and a sad extent it seems to have succeeded. But when the judgment had fallen, and the vindication of Jehovah had been made, it was not only necessary to create a *public sentiment*, in relation to these numbers, which would henceforth prevent their exercising any corrupting influence. They must be regarded as public enemies, and the memory of their wicked enticements must henceforth keep Israel separate from them.

The term that is used, 'vex the Midianites,' recalls the act of Phinehas, who personally dealt with a case of immorality which was brought into the camp; and the idea seems to be that the people should see to cleansing the corrupting influence away by personally dealing with cases of evil, as Phinehas had dealt with these two, Balaam and Cozbi. *Baumgarten* expresses this, in the following sentence: 'In order that the practical zeal of Phinehas against sin, which expiation had been made for the guilt, might be adopted by all the nation.'

It is singular that Midian, and not Moab, should be singled out for this judgment; but from Numbers xxii. 4, 7, we learn that Midian was confederate with Moab in resisting Israel; and we are led to understand that Midian took the more prominent part in the diabolical scheme for securing the ruin of Israel by idolatry and corruption.

The Divine command to smite the Midianites, and so execute the Divine judgments on their iniquity, was obeyed as narrated in chapter xxxi.

*Wordsworth* says: 'The sin of the Midianites was greater (than that of the Moabites), because they were the posterity of faithful Abraham, and as such ought to have feared and obeyed Abraham's God, and to have loved His people, their own kindred; and they had sufficient opportunities of knowing God and His works in Egypt and the wilderness.'

*Matthew Henry* says: 'Moses, though the meekest man, and far from a spirit of revenge, is ordered to "vex the Midianites, and smite them." We must set ourselves against that, whatever it is, which is an occasion of sin to us, though it be a right eye or a right hand and that thus offends us. This is that holy indignation and revenge which godly sorrow worketh (2 Cor. vii. 11). God will certainly reckon with those that do the devil's work in tempting men to sin.'

## Jehu's Mission as Executioner.

2 KINGS x. 7, etc. : 'And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets and sent him them to Jezreel.'

**Difficulty.**—*If God employs an agent as His executioner, to what extent must He be regarded as responsible for the way in which the agent's work is done?*

**Explanation.**—This difficulty can be best met by considering what is recognised as right and wrong in the ordinary executions of common law. So long as the sense of mankind demands capital punishment for some particular crimes, there must be executioners. But such men occupy a strictly official position, and the Government is responsible for the efficient carrying out of the law-penalty, and for nothing more. But it is quite conceivable that the executioner may do his work in a bungling way; he may cause needless suffering; he may be coarse and heartless; he may show personal animosity, or personal favouritism, in the doing of his duty; but the common sense of a country recognises that the Government is responsible for none of these things, and that the executioner may himself be punished for his ways of carrying out his instructions. He may be drunk at his work, and then he is dismissed as a penalty. But the sentence was still a righteous sentence, which the Government was bound to see carried out.

Now we may see how this applies to the case of Jehu. Capital sentence on the royal house of Ahab had been pronounced, quite independently of Jehu, by the supreme over-Lord, the Judge and King of Israel. At the appointed time, Jehu was selected as the executioner of the capital sentence. The choice was manifestly an excellent one. Jehu had precisely the qualities of energy, promptitude and secrecy that fitted him for the work of national executioner. He was not a religious man, and he accepted the commission simply in his loyalty to Israel's over-Lord.

So far as God is concerned in the matter, if we may speak of Him as we speak of an earthly king or Government, His responsibility was limited to the passing of a righteous sentence, and the selection of a suitable agent for carrying the sentence into effect. On Jehu alone rests the responsibility for the methods in which he fulfilled his duty. In those methods we see the terrible brutality characteristic of the age; and the spirit of the rough soldier, only too familiar with bloodshedding, and miserably deficient in his estimate of the value of life. Jehu may be praised for fulfilling his commission.

he must be severely blamed for the way in which he did it. ceptions, cruelties, needless sweeping away of innocent with guilty, ther God nor good men can approve.

*Bishop Wordsworth* compares Henry VIII. of England as a yal Reformer like Jehu. 'Much that he did, especially in the urtherthrow of the usurped dominion of the Bishop of Rome, and in eheading superstition," as Richard Hooker expresses it, was eptable to God, and received a reward and blessing from Him, ough the motives by which he was swayed, and also some of his ions, could not be otherwise than offensive, like those of Jehu, to : God of holiness and truth.'

*Dean Stanley's* estimate of Jehu's character will help in impressing : distinction which we have endeavoured to make between what did and the way in which he did it. 'The character of Jehu is t difficult to understand, if we take it as a whole, and consider the neral impression left on us by the Biblical account. He is exactly e of those men whom we are compelled to recognise, not for what good or great in themselves, but as instruments for destroying evil, d preparing the way for good, such as Augustus Cæsar at Rome, ltan Mahmoud II. in Turkey, or one closer at hand in the revolu- ons of our own time and neighbourhood. A destiny, long kept in ew by himself or others—inscrutable secrecy and reserve in carry- g out his plans—a union of cold, remorseless tenacity with occa- onal bursts of furious, wayward, almost fanatical zeal; this is Jehu,

he is set before us in the historical narrative, the worst type of a on of Jacob—the "supplanter," as he is called, without the noble d princely qualities of Israel—the most unlovely, and the most oldly commended, of all the heroes of his country.'

*Kitto* supports the view we have given in the following sentences: Jehu had been commissioned to execute the Lord's judgment upon e house of Ahab; and his relentless nature concurred with his wn interest in giving the widest possible interpretation to his com- ission; while he was careful, in every fresh deed of blood, to eclare himself the Lord's avenger, who did but execute the orders iven to him. No doubt, he was the appointed minister of delayed dgment; but we cannot fail to see that he used his commission for e purpose of sweeping away from his path all those from whose engeance, or hate, any disturbance might, even by remote construc- on, be apprehended to his future reign.'

*Rev. J. C. Ball*, writing in '*Ellicott's Commentary*,' notices that he word, in the passage before us, translated *slew*, really means *uttered* or *slaughtered*. 'The way in which the writer speaks of

this massacre—"they took the king's sons, and butchered seven persons"—shows that he did not sympathize with Jehu's deeds blood.'

### The Destruction of the Fifties.

2 KINGS i. 10: 'And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.'

**Difficulty.**—*This looks like a use of miraculous power to secure a prophet's personal safety, and in such a use of his power he surely cannot be justified.*

**Explanation.**—We may settle it at once that the power to call down the fire could not have been used for Elijah's personal safety. That would not have been, in the eyes of God, a sufficient occasion for such a miracle. The explanation of the incident must be found in Elijah's official position. He was the public defender of the supreme claims of Jehovah in his generation. He was God's champion-soldier, and the incident before us now is strictly a battle and must be treated according to the sentiments and rules of time of war.

Remove, for a moment, the miraculous features of the story, and let it be that the captain, with his fifty, leads a forlorn hope against an enemy standing at bay in some strongly fortified position. Let the first fifty be cut to pieces, let a second fifty be cut to pieces, and public sentiment would see nothing unusual: only splendid heroism on the part of such soldiers; but no cruelty, no wickedness, on the part of the equally noble defenders.

It is easy to see how this applies to Elijah, who stood at bay, and used the particular forces at his command for the resistance of the enemies of Jehovah, for whom he fought. If Ahaziah chose to put his soldiers against miraculous forces, that was his concern, and he must not be surprised at overwhelming consequences.

Regarding the incident from a somewhat different point of view, may be urged that it occurred under the reign of a new king of Israel; and the question was, whether the great moral impression produced by the fire-scene on Carmel, in the latter part of Ahaziah's reign, were to be wholly lost by the open insult offered to Jehovah by the new king, in passing by Jehovah's prophet, and seeking an oracle from the god of Ekron.

As supreme King of the country, Jehovah could never permit open and public insults to pass by unnoticed. But Ahaziah proceeded from insult to violence. Ahaziah proceeded to force, and sent a strong guard to seize Elijah; and he must consequently learn, in

ry striking and impressive way, that no man can contend with hovah and prosper. The captain and his men are simply conviced as instruments of a will opposing itself to Jehovah. The use of the fire-agency did but significantly recall the overwhelming fire of Carmel, and re-affirm the supreme claims of Jehovah.

The 'Speaker's Commentary' in part supports this view. 'Ahaziah, as it were, challenged Jehovah to a trial of strength by sending a band of fifty to arrest one man. He must have thought that though Elijah, because of his miraculous gifts, could not be taken by a few men, a band of fifty could overpower him. Consequently God was challenged to show His might. . . . In Elijah the spirit of the law is embodied in its full severity. Over some prophets the coming second covenant seems in some sort to project its shadow. It is otherwise with Elijah. His zeal is fierce; he is not shocked by blood; he has no softness and no relenting. If the warning at Horeb had the meaning which we have supposed, he did not permanently profit by it. He continued the uncompromising avenger of sin, the elder of the terrors of the Lord, such exactly as he had shown himself at Carmel. He is, consequently, no pattern for Christian men; but his character is the perfection of the purely legal type. No true Christian, after Pentecost, would have done what he did now. But what he did, when he did it, was not sinful. It was but executing strict, stern justice.'

Indicating the moral purposes which were to be served by the incident, *Kitto* says: 'The awful destruction by fire from heaven—at is, we suppose, by lightning—at the word of Elijah, of the two worst parties sent to apprehend him must have tended powerfully to impress upon the nation the fact that the Lord still asserted His right reign over them, and would be known to them in His protesting judgments, since they would not know him in His mercies. Elijah's cheerfully going with the third party, the leader of which approached him with humble entreaties, must have suggested that the door to those mercies was still open to all who becomingly approached it. This was practical preaching, of the kind that this people could most easily understand.'

*Jamieson* states his explanation very clearly. 'Any appearance of cruelty that there is in the fate of the two captains and their men will be removed, on a full consideration of the circumstances. God calling the King of Israel, Ahaziah was bound to govern the kingdom according to the Divine law: to apprehend the Lord's prophet, for disobeying a commanded duty, was the act of an impious and notorious rebel. The captains abetted the king in his rebellion; and they exceeded their military duty by contemptuous insults.'

## Moses' Sin in breaking the Tables.

EXODUS xxxii. 19: 'And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.'

**Question.**—*Wherein lay the sin of this act? It seems rather to be an expression of very natural, and very righteous, indignation.*

**Answer.**—It is not usually observed that the *meekness* ascribed to Moses was not 'absence of passion,' but 'disinterestedness, genuine interest in others rather than in self. The fact appears to be that the principal weakness in the character of Moses was his impulsiveness—his inability to control himself in moments of passion. In this direction lay his 'easily besetting sin'; and when he gave way to this temptation he brought dishonour upon God, and his acts became sinful. We are too ready to suppose that passion may be admitted as an excuse for wrong-doing, and we need the Divine reproof and judgment of passionate Moses to convince us that God counts it a *evil* thing for a man to lose his self-control, and a *wrong* thing for him to act when his self-control is lost.

We have several cases illustrating this weakness of Moses. Roused by the sight of the Egyptian's oppression, he passionately slew and buried him. As in the passage before us, excited beyond endurance by the sight of the calf, he dashed down the tables. And later on, he was so annoyed with the continual murmuring of the people that he roughly smote the rock to bring forth water for them, and unworthily forgot himself so far as to call the people names. In him we plainly see that evil is evil, and passion is passion, in good people as well as in bad. These things must be called by their right names wherever they are found, and must be corrected by adequate punishments, even in the best of people. Moses cannot be spared the proper judgment on his moral failure.

*Matthew Henry* takes the view that Moses broke the tables in order to convince the Israelites that they had forfeited and lost the favour of God. 'Though God knew of their sins, before Moses came down, yet He did not order him to leave the tables behind him but gave them to him to take down in his hand, that the people might see how forward God was to take them into covenant with Himself, and that nothing but their own sin prevented it; yet He put it into his heart, when the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, to break the tables before their eyes (as it is in Deut. ix. 17), that the sight of it might the more affect them, and fill them with confusion

when they saw what blessings they had lost. Thus, they being guilty of so notorious an infraction of the treaty now on foot, the writings were torn, even when they lay ready to be sealed.'

*George Rawlinson* says: 'In righteous indignation, but perhaps with some revival of the hot temper which had led him astray in his younger days.'

*Jamieson* sees a symbolical meaning in the act of Moses. 'The arrival of the leader, like the appearance of a spectre, arrested the revellers in the midst of their carnival, and his act of righteous indignation, when he dashed on the ground the tables of the law, in token that, as they had so soon departed from their covenant relation, God would withdraw the peculiar privileges that He had promised them—that act, together with the rigorous measures that followed, forms one of the most striking scenes recorded in sacred history.'

*Wordsworth* spiritualizes: 'The two tables were like the marriage-contract between God and His Church, and these were broken by her idolatry—which is spiritual adultery. The Jews preserve a memorial of the breaking of the tables by an annual fast on the 17th Tamuz (July).

## Obedience or Sacrifices.

**I SAMUEL xv. 22, 23:** 'And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim.'

**Question**—*Does not such a declaration excuse the neglect of the ritual and ceremonial aspects of religion?*

**Answer.**—Only if the immediate application of Samuel's words is unrecognised, and the necessity for words of vigour, firmness, and almost exaggeration fails to be seen. Men roused to intense feeling very properly speak strongly. Such times do not admit of careful qualification of statement. Qualifications come in afterwards, and the statements gain precision. A reprover ought to set out the sin for which he reproves men in bold relief, fixing the attention wholly upon the heinousness and ruinousness of it. Samuel would, on due occasion, have qualified his statement, and shown that sacrifices were required by God and were acceptable to Him, because these found due *expression* for the spirit of obedience. He had now to deal with a case in which a man tried to substitute mere ritual observance for heart-obedience, and openly excused his moral failure by an appeal to his ceremonial faithfulness; and the offence of such things, in God's sight, must be clearly and impressively shown.

Tracing the growth of Samuel's thoughts respecting the worship acceptable to God, *Dr. Geikie* remarks, 'The cessation of offerings by the destruction of the sanctuary (at the close, of Eli's time) would soon suggest to a mind so imbued with the spirit of the law whether, after all, they were indispensable to the pure worship of God, or to a holy life. The formal would be felt wholly subordinate in religion to the spiritual, and the highest fulfilment of the law would present itself as that of the heart and life. This elevation of the moral above the external, indeed, was the great characteristic of the prophetic order of which Samuel was to be the founder, and the permanent safeguard against the substitution of outward form for the vitality of inner religion. The truest reverence for God is loving obedience to His commands, and these were embodied in the Book of the Law which Samuel had so deeply studied in Shiloh. The ceremonial was, no doubt, prescribed in it, and had its place in the religious economy. But it was outward at best. Far more vital than ritual service was hearty loyalty to the 'Ten Words' spoken by God from Sinai, of which the whole moral and spiritual teaching of the law was only the amplification. Israel could not have been separated from the nations merely to present formal offerings and sacrifices to Jehovah, or to pay Him external homage. They must have been thus set apart that, like Abraham, they should keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, and obey His voice, and keep His charge,, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* well explains the figures employed in verse 23. 'The principle of this solemn sentence of Samuel is, that the man who disobeys God, is virtually guilty of consulting familiar spirits, and of resorting to sorcery, instead of obeying God's will as revealed in His Word; and that he is guilty of setting up idols in his own heart in the place of God, and in opposition to Him. He who disobeys God is chargeable with infidelity and idolatry. Saul had been chosen out of all the tribes of Israel by the Lord to be king; and, by disobeying the Word of the Lord, he, the king of Israel, the chosen servant of Jehovah, had been guilty of apostasy from Him, and had consulted the familiar spirit of his own carnal wilfulness, and had bowed down before the idols which he had made for himself.'

*Wordsworth* also quotes a fine saying from *S. Gregory*, 'In sacrifices a man offers only strange flesh, whereas in obedience he offers his own will.'

## Elisha's Curses.

2 KINGS ii. 24 : 'And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.'

**Difficulty.**—*The provocation in this case does not seem to have been sufficient to call forth curses, or to require so dreadful a punishment.*

**Explanation.**—Some care is necessary in the examination of this passage, so that we may first of all be sure that we know precisely what happened. The word translated 'little children' rather means 'youths.' Their expression, 'thou bald head,' was extremely insolent and offensive, according to Eastern notions. And though Elisha cursed them, the actual agency of their punishment was an ordinary Divine Providence. We may consider first wherein lay the sin of these young men; and then how far Elisha was justified in cursing them.

*Van Lennep* gives us the best idea of the class of young men who thus insulted the prophet. 'No one who has travelled in the East can have failed to notice the extreme lawlessness of a certain class of boys and young men living on the outskirts of a town, especially towards a Jew, a Christian, or an European who should happen to be passing by alone or unprotected. Let him go, for instance, to the castle hill of Smyrna, and, if it be a holiday, and the 'boys' (*oghians*) are out, he will perceive stones whizzing past him, and will hear the shouts of "Frank," "Hat-wearer," "Giaour," rallying the rowdies of the vicinity, and warning him to beat a hasty retreat.'

But however insulting and perilous such lawlessness might be, it would not justify a man of God in cursing the 'boys.' We must look more closely into the narrative. And it appears that Bethel was one of the centres of Jeroboam's calf-worship. (This, indeed, has been of late years disputed, and another Bethel is proposed as Jeroboam's city. But the old identification is still to be preferred.) 'The choice of Bethel as the head-quarters of the calf-worship, the seat of a grand temple built in opposition to that at Jerusalem, and of a royal palace, had at once flattered and enriched the inhabitants, and kindled their fierce and interested hatred of those, who, like the prophets, denounced the royal action. The citizens had become, it would appear, almost the counterparts of the bigoted Mahomedans of Safed or Nablûs, who at this day insult and often attack any Christian stranger who enters their limits, even the children cursing the "infidel" as he passes.' Compare the opposition headed by Demetrius, at Ephesus, against Paul. We are to understand there-

fore, that these 'boys' did but violently express the hatred of the townsfolk at Bethel against the Jehovah prophet; and that Elisha treated them, not as acting in mere wilfulness, but as expressing the feeling of the citizens, whose hatred to *him* was really hatred to Jehovah, whose name he bore.

Some see in their cry against Elisha a reference to the previous translation of Elijah, but this is not likely. Their words simply mean what we express by 'Get out, you; get out.' Nor need we suppose that Elisha was really bald. He only contrasted with Elijah, who was a characteristically hairy man. *Roberts*, who illustrates the Bible so skilfully from Hindoo customs, says, 'I was not a little astonished in the East, when I first heard a man who had a large quantity of hair on his head called a "bald head"; and I found, upon inquiry, it was an epithet of contempt. A man who has killed himself is called "a bald-headed suicide"; and a stupid fellow "a bald-headed dunce." It is asked concerning those who are powerless, "What can these bald heads do?" Call a man a *mottiyan*, that is, "a bald head" (though he may have much hair), and then abuse, sticks or stones will certainly be your portion. Thus the epithet implies great scorn, and is given to those who are weak or mean.'

*Kitto* brings out the heinousness of the sin of these 'boys.' 'These youths were not accidentally encountered: they did not happen to be at their sports outside the town where the prophet passed, but they "came out" of *malice prepense* "to meet" and insult him. Such a purpose against the prophet must have been the result of their ungodly training in that evil place, and must have had its roots in the sneers and sarcasms which they had heard all their lives levelled at the name and acts of Elijah. Him, surrounded as he was with terrors, they would not have dared thus to insult and abuse; but from his comparatively meek and gentle successor, whom they had never hitherto seen in any position of authority, they thought there was nothing to apprehend, so that they could with impunity pour forth the blackness of their hearts upon him. The offence, involving as it did a blasphemous insult cast upon one of the Lord's most signal acts (this supposes a designed reference to Elijah's translation), made a near approach to what in the New Testament is called the sin against the Holy Ghost.'

No detailed explanation is given us of the terms of Elisha's curse. We must not bring our modern associations with cursing and swearing into the word. Elisha simply invoked the Divine judgment on these wild and blasphemous and contemptuous youths. As if he

had said, 'I will take no sort of vengeance on them for these insults : the Lord Himself avenge me.'

It is a needless forcing of the narrative to assume that the she-bears rushed out of the wood as soon as Elisha had spoken. The simple fact appears to be that in the neighbourhood of the Wady Suweinit there was a dense forest, the haunt of savage animals. About this time two she bears, bereft of their young, and, as usual in such cases, terribly wild, destroyed some forty-two of the town-children, tearing and wounding, if not actually killing them all. This calamity was associated by the people with Elisha's curse, and regarded as its fulfilment.

As a sufficient moral reason for such a judgment at this particular time, it may be urged, that if 'an insult offered to Elisha, now just appointed to be the successor and representative of Elijah, and bearing his prophetic mantle, as the chosen prophet of the Lord, had passed unnoticed, the idolaters of Bethel might have been hardened in their idolatry, and the prophets and worshippers of the Lord would have been discouraged.'

### Judgment on Saul's House.

2 SAMUEL xxi. 1 : 'And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year ; and David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites.'

*Question.*—How can God be thus represented as keeping up the memory of wrongs, and reserving His vengeance, when we, who are to be like Him, are told not to let the sun go down upon our wrath?

*Answer.*—There are few incidents recorded in the historical Scriptures so seriously perplexing as this one, and so difficult to reconcile with our notions of the Divine Being. Almost all that can be said is, that the idea of retribution prevailed in ancient times to an extent which we cannot realize, and was the common idea of the working of Divine justice. Retributive providences were expected to clear away the guilt of blood, as the Avenger, or Goël, cleared it in yet earlier times. By the teachings of large national and public avengements God taught that 'murder will out,' and that 'whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' The painful and dreadful form which such avengement took, we can only say, belonged to the manners of the time.

Professor Gardiner, D.D., in 'Ellicott's Commentary,' gives the clearest and best note we have met with. 'Two questions are often asked in connection with this narrative : (1) Why the punishment of

Saul's sin should have been so long delayed? and (2) why it should at last have fallen upon David and his people, who had no share in the commission of the sin? The answer to both questions is in the fact that Israel both sinned and was punished *as a nation*. Saul slew the Gibeonites, not simply as the son of Kish, but as the king of Israel, and therefore involved all Israel with him in the violation of the national oath; and hence, until the evil should be put away by the execution of the immediate offender or his representatives, all Israel must suffer. The lesson of the continuity of the nation's life, and of its continued responsibility from age to age, was greatly enhanced by the delay. Besides this, there were so many other grievous sins for which Saul was to be punished, that it was hardly possible to bring out, during his lifetime, the special Divine displeasure at this one.'

*Matthew Henry* sententiously says: 'Time does not wear out the guilt of sin; nor can we build hopes of impunity upon the delay of judgments. There is no statute of limitation to be pleaded against God's demands. God may punish when He pleases.'

We must carefully distinguish between judicial acts done in the maintenance of public authority, and private feelings of resentment and acts of vengeance. God, in Israel, is not an individual giving expression to a sense of private wrong, but a King giving expression to fitting vindication of national justice and righteousness; and things are necessary and becoming in the official King, which would be most unworthy in the private individual.

### Jehoram's Anger.

2 KINGS vi. 31: 'Then he said, God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.'

**Question.**—*Why did this king vent his anger upon the prophet?*

**Answer.**—Because he confounded the 'agent' with the 'cause'; and was glad to shift the responsibility for the national distress from off his own shoulders. Jehoram's neglect of God, and encouragement of idolatry, were the real causes of the national calamity, because these brought upon him and his people the Divine judgments. He was really angry with God for punishing him; and, as he could not reach God, he proposed to spend his rage on God's servant. Men oftentimes hide their anger against themselves by a show of anger against somebody else; but such hidings never hide the truth from God.

So far as the Scripture narrative is concerned, we have no intima-

tion that Elisha was, in any prophetic way, connected with this siege and famine. It is assumed that he was commissioned to announce it, so that the people might clearly see it as a judgment of God, and not a mere calamity. But, possibly, Jehoram only argued that Elisha, who had wrought so many miracles, could have given deliverance in this case, if he had pleased. This is suggested by the fretful expression used by the king (see ver. 33), 'What should I wait for the Lord any longer?' 'Jehoram bursts into the prophet's presence with a justification of the sentence he has pronounced against him. "Behold this evil—this siege with all its horrors—is from Jehovah—from Jehovah whose prophet thou art. Why should I wait for Jehovah—temporize with Him—keep, as it were, on terms with Him by suffering thee to live—any longer? What hast thou to say in arrest of judgment?"'

*Jamieson* explains the incident thus: 'The horrid recital of this domestic tragedy (ver. 29) led the king soon after to rend his garment, in consequence of which it was discovered that he wore a penitential shirt of hair cloth. It is more than doubtful, however, if he was truly humbled on account of his own and the nation's sin; otherwise he would not have vowed vengeance on the prophet's life. The true explanation seems to be that Elisha, having counselled him not to surrender, with the promise, on condition of deep humiliation, of being delivered, and he having assumed the signs of contrition without receiving the expected relief, regarded Elisha, who had proved false and faithless, as the cause of all the protracted distress.'

*Wordsworth* is very severe on Jehoram. 'Jehoram had sackcloth on his loins, but not on his heart; he mourned indeed for the famine, but not for the cause of it, namely, his own sins and the sins of the people; and instead of being penitent towards God, he is furious against God's prophet.'

## The Proverb of the Sour Grapes.

EZEKIEL xviii. 2: 'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?'

**Difficulty.**—*Has the law of heredity, which carries disabilities to children from parental wrong-doing, a sufficient moral purpose to justify it?*

**Explanation.**—It should be observed that, in this instance, a false use is made of the doctrine of heredity. It is offered as an explanation of suffering, which may excuse the sufferers from any

charge of personal guilt. The carrying of disabilities on to the children is, in the Divine order, arranged to make *public* impression of the evil of sin, and to keep constantly before men's minds the fact of the solidarity of the race, on which the social order is based. This is the moral purpose which justifies it; but the fact and truth are used for immoral purposes when they are made to relieve the sense of personal responsibility, and lead men to lose anxiety concerning their own transgressions by charging all evil on the 'father' or on the 'race.'

The circumstances under which Ezekiel urged his pleading should be understood. 'The situation of the exiled people was such as to call for and suggest such instruction. The judgments, in the approach of which they had long refused to believe, were at last making themselves too manifest to be overlooked. But the people were ready to evade the lesson which they should have learnt, by having recourse to the heathen principle of a blind fatality of retribution, which offered no means of escape either to the nation or to individuals, and so prevented consciousness of guilt and of responsibility. They had, indeed, a certain apparent ground to rest upon in the Second Commandment, where God declares that He "will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children;" but it was only apparent. Here God enunciates that which He declared throughout the Law, and which had been illustrated in the whole history of the people, that national sins should be followed by national judgment. This did not, in fact, interfere with the principle that each individual should be answerable for his own conduct, and should be equitably dealt with, any more than the fact that, in all times, temporal consequences of the acts of a nation or of individuals extend beyond themselves and their own times. The state of exile was intended to develop this principle, and so the prophet of the captivity was led to anticipate in a remarkable manner the sublimer morality of the Gospel.' ('Speaker's Commentary.')

It is necessary that we should keep in mind 'the two-fold relation, the individual and the federal, in which each man stands to his Maker. It is in virtue of the federal relation that, on the one hand, as children of Adam, we are all born into the world with a predisposition to sin, and, on the other, are all partakers of the benefits of the redemption wrought out for us by the Second Adam. Under the laws of nature it must necessarily come about that the children shall suffer or enjoy in consequence of the uprightness or the sin of their fathers. Yet more important, and prevailing above this federal relation, is the attitude of each individual towards God. By this

through the reconciliation effected by the redemption of Christ, he is brought into communion with God, and, becoming one with Christ, is viewed and treated as a member of the body of the only begotten Son. This does not hinder that the laws of nature shall still work out their natural effects: we still must be subject to death, because our first father sinned; but it does bring about that all these natural sufferings are transformed into higher blessings.\* (*Dr. F. Gardiner.*)

## Screening the First Murderer.

GENESIS iv. 15: 'And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Why was not the foundation law of human society, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' carried out in the case of Cain?*

**Answer.**—The law of murder was only thus distinctly stated as the basis law of society as it was started afresh after the cleansing Flood; and it is altogether confusing to associate it with the conditions and relations of the first human family.

The point which we require to see clearly is, that no law for the punishment of a crime can be promulgated until the crime has been committed. Nobody would understand what the crime was until it had been wrought by some one. But, then, government must step in to deal with something which has arisen imperilling the social order. The first criminal creates the law that shall deal with the particular crime; but the first criminal may fairly urge that he was unwarned, and so ought not to be the first to bear the penalty.

We act precisely on this principle in family life. There is no house-law concerning some kind of fault, because no member of the family has committed it. But one of the boys does the wrong; and at once a law is made, with appropriate threat of punishment. But no parent could fairly make the first sinner bear the penalty which he fixed only *after* the sin was committed. It may be necessary to inflict some punishment, but not the severe one which was henceforth to exert a graciously deterrent effect.

This should be applied to the case of Cain. He knew of no law of murder that demanded blood for blood. He did not even know that the crime of murder was. As soon as his deed was done, conscience awoke, it brought fear; fear took its universal form—

\* Two other paragraphs will be found in this section dealing with this subject from other points of view.

dread of retaliation : 'As I have done, so somebody will do to me.' God then established the law of murder, by accepting Cain's fear that some one would slay him. It is as if He had said : 'Yes ; blood for blood shall be the universal murder-law. But since you were unwarned, and gave the first example of the crime, you shall not be also first example of the penalty.' Separation from society was the punishment adapted to the sins of envy and passion into which Cain had fallen ; but the precise penalty of murder was held over until the next case, when, if a man killed his fellow, he could only do so understanding his guilt, threatened with punishment, and braving the penalty.

This explanation fairly faces a difficulty which the leading Biblical writers either shirk or do not consider of importance. Only *Lange* even states it, among those we have consulted ; but his treatment of it seems very unsatisfactory. He says : 'We may ask, Why was not the punishment of death imposed on Cain, as is demanded by the later law (ch. ix. 6), instead of exile ? It is not a sufficient answer to say that the parents of Cain could not execute such a sentence ; the cherubim might have crushed him. But it becomes evident, already, that the religious social death of absolute banishment from human society constitutes the peculiar essence of the death-penalty.' The unsatisfactoriness of such an explanation is shown by the historical fact that Cain was not shut out from general society, but was the founder of the chief families with which the old world was peopled, and that from him came the progenitors of the world's arts and music.

## Natural Warmth for the Aged Sick.

1 KINGS i. 2 : 'Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin.'

**Question.**—*Can any explanations be given that may remove the sense of impropriety which is given us by this suggestion ?*

**Answer.**—The suggestion was made in strict accordance with the medical ideas of those times, and might have been offered by the physician of the court. We know well that one of the greatest difficulties we have to contend with in nursing old people is deficiency of circulation, involving coldness of the extremities. So we chafe the hands, and put hot-water bottles to the feet. The Easterns used the plan of laying a full-blooded healthy person beside the aged and sick one, so that the natural warmth of the healthy one might be imparted to the colder one ; and no more efficient plan could be

devised, though our feelings make difficulties in trying this method which Eastern people would not realise.

As a great deal has been made of this incident by those who desire to find opportunities for attacking the morality of the Bible, several explanations of the Eastern custom, with good authorities, may be presented.

*Gadsby* says : 'The people of the East, who have beds, always sleep in *separate* beds; no two persons, not even man and wife, sleeping together. I used, therefore, to wonder what Solomon meant when he wrote, "If two lie together, there is heat; but how can one be warm alone?" But there can be no doubt that he referred to the custom, which was generally practised, of the aged and infirm having young healthy persons with them in bed to keep them warm, and even, as they suppose, to impart *vital* heat.'

*Josephus* tells us the arrangement was made by the advice of the physicians.

A writer on Eastern customs says : 'This is by no means so uncommon a thing as people in England suppose. Men of seventy years and upwards often take a young virgin for the same purpose as David, and no other. It is believed to be exceedingly healthful for an aged person thus to sleep. In the hot season he is kept cool, and in the cold season warm, by sleeping with a young person : his withered body derives nourishment from the other. Thus, decrepit men may be seen having a young female in the house (to whom, generally, they are not married), and to whom they bequeath a considerable portion of their property.'

*Jamieson* gives a very full and precious account of the custom. 'In modern Palestine and in Egypt, the people, owing to the heat of the climate, sleep each in a separate bed. They only departed from this practice for medical reasons. The expedient recommended by David's physicians is the regimen prescribed in similar cases still in the East, particularly among the Arab population, not simply to give heat, but "to cherish"; as they are aware that the inhalation of young breath will give new life and vigour to the worn-out frame. The fact of the health of the young and healthier person being, as it were, stolen to support that of the more aged and sickly is well established among the medical faculty. And hence the prescription for the aged king was made in a hygeian point of view for the prolongation of his valuable life, and not merely for the comfort to be derived from the natural warmth imparted to his withered frame.'

## Jehovah-Sacrifice of Heathen Sailors.

JONAH i. 16: 'Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.'

**Question.**—*In what sense could idolaters offer sincere sacrifice to Jehovah; and could such sacrifice be accepted?*

**Answer.**—From the statement made in verse 5, we gather that the crew of this ship was made up of men of various nationalities, as indeed is the case with modern crews. It is a peculiarity of idolatry that the forms under which the several deities are conceived and represented are special to particular lands and nations; and the untutored minds regard the distinct forms as separate deities, and worship them as such. There seems, however, always to lie, as it were at the back of thought, the notion of One great Spirit, and this leads an idolatrous people to be jealous of their own form of apprehending and presenting Him, but at the same time tolerant of those in other lands, who worshipped Him under other and different forms. It does not seem that idolaters persecute one another. Their sentiment seems to be: 'This form is right for me, and that form may be right for you.'

These sailors, therefore, would suppose Jonah to have a god, even as they had. He was the god of the land of Palestine, and it was now made evident to them that his power extended as far as this over the sea that skirted the land. We need not suppose them to have had any idea of the supreme claims and spiritual nature of Jehovah, the God of the whole earth; they had come into the power of the 'god of the land of Palestine, and, doing as they would have done to any other national god whom they seemed to have offended, they offered sacrifices of propitiation. The vows they made were such as they would have made to any idol-god, pledging respect for the national deity if they should ever visit the land again.

To assume that Jonah preached the claims of Jehovah to these sailors is to read our own ideas into the story, and to forget that Israel had at this time no call to missionary service.

As to the Divine acceptance of the sailors' sacrifice and vows, we can only say that He who readeth the heart asks the sacrifice of sincerity, and is really—though all men do not know Him as such—the God of the whole earth, and He may have 'smelled a sweet and acceptable savour' that day. He who did accept the Ninevites who 'repented' in their own way, may also have accepted these earnest sailors who 'sacrificed' in their own way.

## Bathsheba's Child Favoured.

2 SAMUEL xii. 24, 25 : 'And she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon : and the Lord loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet ; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*The favour shown to Solomon, and the consequent setting aside of the other children of David, tends to lighten our estimate of the moral fault of Bathsheba and David.*

**Explanation.**—In the instruction of humanity, in the revelation of God to man, in what has been called the 'moral education of the race,' it may be necessary that a very prominent instance should be given of the truth that *God fully restores when He freely forgives.*

Exactly *this* man finds the utmost difficulty in realizing. In this man is no measure of God, for man finds it nearly impossible to *restore* either the punished or the forgiven to their former status. We feel the surprise and the offence which the elder brother felt when the prodigal was both forgiven and fully restored to his old son-place and brother-place in the home. We know how to punish the criminal ; we even know how to forgive him. But we cannot *restore* him ; we are afraid to restore him ; it is beyond man to restore.

But restoration becomes the supremely important thing in the case of a pious man who is overcome by passion, and backslides. We feel at once that, if it were our own case, punishment could not satisfy us—forgiveness even would not satisfy us ; nothing could satisfy us short of restoration to our old relations and privileges. We should pray, just as David did on this very occasion, 'Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.'

Restored favour, without punishment, penitence, or forgiveness, would tend to lighten our estimate of evil. But *such* restoration God never gives, and He did not give in the case of David and Bathsheba. Restored favour after punishment, penitence and forgiveness at once gives a deeper sense of guilt and a more impressive sense of God's mercy. It was *such* a restoration God granted in the case of David ; and the acceptance of the child of the marriage as the king's heir was a most gracious sealing of the restored relations.

As to setting aside the other sons of David by former marriages, we need only be reminded that the law of succession by the eldest son is the one with which we are familiar ; but it is not the universal, it is even questionable whether it is the established, law in the East. Certainly it was not the law in the Hebrew race. Isaac was not eldest, nor was Jacob, nor was Moses, nor was David himself. So

far as we can trace a rule in the matter, the dying patriarch or king had the right of nomination from among his sons, and in exercising this right he was assumed to have special Divine direction and inspiration. No wrong was done to the other sons by a Divinely guided selection of a particular one.

*Bishop Wordsworth* puts the point of the above explanation into a sentence: 'Solomon, in his name (peaceable), was a record of the peace which God had restored to David's conscience.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* says: 'Loathing the sin he had committed, he yearns after a better future, in which it will be seen how thoroughly he has forsaken evil, and returned to a pure, just, and godly spirit. In the thirty-second Psalm the heavens begin to clear: he has confessed his sin and forsaken it, and has found mercy. The bow on the cloud shone out fully at last on the birth of a second son of Bathsheba. David called his name Solomon ("the peaceful"), perhaps in the belief that the gift of a child in the place of the one that had died was a pledge of the fully restored favour of God.'

## Lion Punishments.

2 KINGS xvii. 25: 'And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them.'

**Question.**—*Is not the ordinary increase of wild animals in a depopulated country here confounded with a special Divine judgment: and does not the confusion indicate superstition rather than faith?*

**Answer.**—We have in this passage the pious conclusion of the Jewish writer given as correcting the idolatrous conclusion of the heathen colonists. It is in fullest harmony with the Hebrew belief in the unity and supremacy of Jehovah, that even the ordinary incidents of life should be regarded as under the direct Divine over-rulings. The Hebrew saw God everywhere, and working in everything. He readily passed over the apparent, but really secondary, causes as if they were not interesting to him, and let his mind rest entirely on the great First Cause. From our modern points of view we call the Hebrew 'unscientific.' But that conclusion is only the result of a prevailing bias of a particular age, and the Hebrew might fairly urge against us that we are limiting our vision to mere agencies, and blinding our eyes to the real cause.

So far as the Scripture is a revelation of God to man, it is befitting that everywhere and in everything God's relations and God's workings should stand out prominently before us, and be adequately impressed upon us.

The colonists regarded the increase of the lions, and their violence, and daring depredations, as an indication that the god of the country was offended by the neglect of his worship. This was true; but it was the truth as seen by their imperfect and distorted vision. We call their view 'superstitious,' but the writer of the Book of Kings helps us to understand that it was true in substance, and superstitious only in form. The very simple and natural facts of the case seem to have been that some time elapsed between the carrying away of the people of Samaria and the re-occupying of the district by the Assyrian colonists. As is quite usual in such cases, the lions indigenous to the country had multiplied while the district was uninhabited, and had become much more venturesome and ravenous. The only point that need be considered as supporting this explanation is the proof we have of the existence of lions in the country. In earlier times we find many Scriptural references to this animal, such as Judg. xiv. 5; 1 Sam. xvii. 34; 2 Sam. xxiii. 20; Prov. xxii. 13; xxvi. 13; and certain allusions made by Jeremiah (xlix. 19; l. 44), suggest that, even when the country was well populated, lions lurked in the thick jungle on the banks of the Jordan.

### The Lord's Hate.

MALACHI i. 3: 'And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.'

**Question.**—*In what senses, and under what limitations, can the word 'hate' be properly applied to the feeling and action of the Divine Being?*

**Answer.**—The general answer, which should suffice to explain all the anthropopathic representations of God in the Old Testament, is expressed in a sentence by *Professor Henry Rogers*: 'God speaks to the heart of man in the language of its own emotions.' But *Dean Plumptre* notices the extreme care with which the Scriptures correct the tendency to misuse these anthropopathic representations:—'He is patient, long-suffering, and full of tender mercies. He is stirred to wrath and jealousy. He repents of what was in His heart. He pleads with His people, makes His acts dependent on their prayers, smells the sweet savour of their sacrifice, or their deeds of love, and so is propitiated and appeased. And yet here, too, there is the same ever-recurring protest against pushing the parable too far—against ascribing to God any human feelings but those which are consistent with the highest human excellence—against thinking wickedly that He is even such an one as ourselves. "The strength of Israel is

not a man, that He should repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29); "Are not My ways equal, are not your ways unequal?" (Ezek. xviii. 29); "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out" (Job xxxvii. 23). Man is taught to see in his own emotions, when they are at their noblest, that through which he may learn in some measure to find God.'

We find it much easier to realize to ourselves a *weak* kind of goodness than a *strong* kind of goodness. We estimate more worthily the gentleness of Christ than His moral strength. And because of this tendency of the Christian mind to unduly glorify the passive virtues, all the strong qualities, the jealousies, wraths, hatings, indignations, that are righteous possessions of noble natures have come to be treated as altogether evil. One is surprised, and even shocked, to hear it plainly stated that the good man *ought* to hate, ought to be indignant, ought to be jealous; and that, therefore, these things, so far as they are right in man, as related to his fellow-man, may properly represent high and noble qualities in God as related to man. Yet the truth of this becomes quite plain as we fix our thoughts upon it, and get ourselves free from the entangling of cherished sentiment.

This explanation, however, though answering the question proposed, does not relieve the difficulty of the expression reported by Malachi. For *that* we must take note of the changed meaning of the word 'hate.' Nowadays it means, 'have a personal aversion to;' 'regard with ill-will.' But when our Bible was translated, it had a simpler and kinder meaning: 'love less;' 'show less favour to.' And this is the meaning of the word as used in Malachi. Moreover, the subject treated of is not the Divine feeling towards the two *persons*, Jacob and Esau, but the providential arrangements for the location of the *tribes* of Jacob and Esau. A favourable heritage was the lot of one; an unfavourable and trying heritage was the lot of the other. In a very similar way the fertility of England and Scotland might be compared; and, in the figurative language of poetry, it might be said, 'England has God loved, and Scotland has He hated' or 'loved less.' We should not misconceive such a statement by supposing that any evil feelings towards Scotland (or towards Edom) were indicated by the expression.

Sufficient illustration of the Scriptural use of the word 'hate,' as meaning, 'love second,' 'love after,' and not as meaning 'dislike,' 'treat with aversion,' may be found in Deut. xxi. 15; Prov. xiii. 24.

## NEW TESTAMENT.

## Forms without Meaning.

MATTHEW iii. 15 : 'But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it now : for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.'

**Difficulty.**—*There appears to be in this instance the example of obeying a form which has, for the person concerned, no spiritual meaning.*

**Explanation.**—All religious forms, rites, and ceremonies are arranged for bodies of people—not for individuals, and the precision of the individual relation to them must always vary. We unite with our nation in a public day of humiliation, but some of us do not even approve of such days. We unite with our Church in publicly acknowledging ourselves to be 'miserable sinners,' but some of us cannot admit that such terms suitably describe us. We unite with the Christian world in the observance of the Lord's Supper, and some of us are not at all sure that our Lord contemplated the founding of such an ordinance. But in none of these cases may we regard the differing ones as insincere. There can be no common expression unless men are willing to sink their personal notions and feelings in order to complete the unity of action. It is in the very nature of a fixed form that it cannot adjust itself to varieties of feeling ; and yet masses of people can only express themselves through fixed forms.

John's baptism was a *national* matter. It was the rite that expressed the national repentance, and the national entrance into a new life. It was the beginning of a 'new kingdom.' We are not told that this or that *man* came to the baptism, but this and that class, soldiers, common people, scribes, Pharisees, etc. It would have been no complete representation of the nation if the pious ones, those looking for the Messiah, had held aloof, regarding the baptism of repentance as unsuitable for them. Jesus belonged to, and stood for, this class in the nation.

In previous public acts of national penitence the good and the bad blended. Joshua had not personally sinned in the matter of Achan, but he put himself along with the people in his act of confession. Daniel had held fast his integrity throughout his life, but he stands long with the sinners, and speaks for them before God, saying,

'We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments.' No one ever thought of suspecting Daniel of insincerity in his joining in a repentance which did not apply to himself; and in the case of our Lord's baptism we have the same thing, the good man heartily and sincerely sharing in a national and public act, which did not strictly apply to himself.

*Schenkel* regards our Lord's submission to John's baptism as *vicarious*. This is not, however, just the point we have been presenting. It was simply *a Jew's duty* in that age, and our Lord saw no reason why He should be an exception. The nation was—with regret for its past—to step on to its new era. He spoke, through this rite, His regrets along with His people.

*Lange* says that the act was *solidary* in its character—that 'social righteousness drew Him down into the stream.' In this direction lies the true relief of our difficulty, and the adequate explanation of our Lord's action. 'It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,' may be restated thus—'From whatever God has required of Israel as a duty, I cannot withhold myself.' It would have been an overdoing of individuality if Christ had held aloof from the public religious form of his day; and it is a very mistaken and mischievous overdoing of individuality which nowadays leads men to withdraw themselves from common religious forms and rites, on mere pleas of intellectual divergence.

Biblical writers do not usually discuss the point of difficulty as it is stated in this paragraph. They concern themselves with the question of the sinlessness of Christ, which is not brought before us by the Scripture narrative.

*De Pressensé* in part supports the explanation which we have presented. 'The baptism of Christ was first of all designed solemnly to inaugurate His ministry. It was on this account it was attended with the remarkable circumstances which mark its importance. To see in it only that in which it resembles an ordinary baptism, and to pass by those points in which it differs, is to ignore its distinctive features, and to be untrue to historical facts. John, the representative of the old covenant, is commissioned to proclaim, in the name of the prophets and holy men whose legitimate successor he is, that the new covenant has begun, and the promised Messiah is come. But this kingdom of heaven, which is about to be set up on the earth, will have for its subjects humble and sorrowful souls and contrite hearts. The baptism of repentance is the affecting symbol of this whole dispensation. Is it not fit that the King of a repentant people should

Himself prepare the way? Is He not identified with the race that He comes to represent? He who is to die for it, may He not for it repent, and bear on His heart the burden of its moral miseries? In the Mosaic institutions, defilement was not confined to the defiled person; contact with such an one rendered purification necessary. Here we have not simply contact with a fallen race; there is the most absolute union with it. This mystery is the very basis of redemption, and it is not more difficult to admit it on the banks of the Jordan than in the garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross.'

To this may be added the suggestive remarks of *Rev. J. Stalker, M.A.*: 'The baptism itself had an important significance for Jesus. To the other candidates who underwent the rite it had a double meaning; it signified the abandonment of their old sins, and their entrance into the new Messianic era. To Jesus it could not have the former meaning, except in so far as He may have identified Himself with His nation, and taken this way of expressing His sense of its need of cleansing. But it meant that He, too, was now entering through this door into the new epoch, of which He was Himself to be the Author. It expressed his sense that the time had come to leave behind the employments of Nazareth, and devote Himself to His peculiar work.'

*Dean Plumptre* has the following sentence: 'It was meet that He should fill up the full measure of righteousness in all its forms by accepting a divine ordinance, even, perhaps, *because* it seemed to place Him in fellowship with sinners.'

## St. Paul's Depreciation of Marriage.

1 CORINTHIANS vii. 8: 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them that they abide even as I.'

**Difficulty.**—*How can this apostle's views on marriage be reconciled with other teachings of the sacred Word?*

**Explanation.**—Limitations of inspiration, as qualifying the authority of his advice, is declared by the apostle himself. So far as foundation truths and first principles of moral duty—from the Christian standpoint—were concerned, St. Paul had a direct and sufficient personal inspiration, giving due authority to his teachings. So far as he was led, in response to the inquiries of the Churches in their practical difficulties, to attempt an adjustment of these principles to various details of Christian conduct and relations, under passing conditions of society, St. Paul was dependent on observation, experience, knowledge, and good judgment—even as other men. He

gave his advice—it was wise advice for the time and the occasion; and it is of permanent value to us as illustrating the methods in which the new Christian principles may appropriately gain their practical applications.

If this distinction be temperately examined, it will be found to exalt our idea of the inspiration of the apostles. As God does not reveal matters of science, which man can find out by the use of his faculties, so He does not inspire counsels on details of Christian conduct, which renewed men ought to be able to settle for themselves in each generation.

No advice concerning such things as marriage, slavery, methods of government, or relations of masters and servants could be authoritatively given, as applicable to every nation or every age. We have in St. Paul's remarks about marriage simply his own personal feelings as a man separated to the work of preaching the Gospel, and unwilling to enter into any such responsibilities as would fetter his liberty for this work. He gives the advice of an enthusiast, and it is advice only for those who can receive it. He himself regards it as given hopelessly, for he well knows the power of human passion, and the workings of the natural laws that control the propagation of the species. Not all the apostles together could, if they would, alter the human sentiment concerning marriage. At given times, and for certain persons, marriage may be wisely avoided, and this is all that St. Paul means and teaches.

*Dr. Marcus Dods* suggests some points which relieve the difficulty of this Pauline advice. 'Paul had to speak about marriage as he found it—as it existed amongst those to whom he wished to be of service. Hence he makes no allusion to that which among ourselves is the main argument for, or at least the common motive to, marriage, viz., love. Marriage is here treated from a lower point of view than it would have been had this letter been originally written for Englishmen. In the marriages of the Jews and Greeks, love had, as a rule, little or nothing to do.

'And not only had Paul to speak of marriage as he found it, but he was here only giving answers to some special questions, and not discussing the whole subject in all its bearings. There might be other points which to his mind seemed equally important, but his advice not having been asked about these, he passes them by. His advice proceeds not from any ascetic tendency, but from the practical bias of his mind. He had no idea that marriage was a morally inferior condition; on the contrary, he saw in it the most perfect symbol of the union of Christ and the Church. But he thought that

unmarried men were likely to be most available for the work of Christ, and therefore he could not but wish it were possible, though he knew it was not possible, that all unmarried men should remain unmarried.'

## Conditions of Final Judgment.

MATTHEW xxv. 40: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these **My** brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me.'—*Rev. Ver.*

**Difficulty.**—*Can the one matter of personal charity be the basis on which every man is to be judged at the great Assize?*

**Explanation.**—It seems probable that the Christian Church has made a wider and more general application of our Lord's teaching in this connection than He intended. The chapter has been regarded as containing two parables and a descriptive passage—the two parables of the Virgins and the Talents, and the description of the scene of the day of judgment. But thoughtful persons readily suggest that the circumstances and events of the 'day of judgment' cannot possibly be expressed in detail in human language; all connected with it must be beyond our present understanding, and can only be suggested to us by figures of speech. Moreover, it is not in the manner of Christ to attempt any descriptive unveilings of the mystery of the future life. It would surprise us if Christ could be shown to have indicated either the state of the redeemed in heaven, or of the lost in hell, or the precise events of judgment, because it was characteristic of Him that He touched these great themes only with the suggestive figures of poetic language. He conveyed general impressions; He unfolded and illustrated great principles; but concerning the future He gave no bare facts.

A closer examination of this chapter brings to light that it contains *three* parables, and not two; and that what we have regarded as a descriptive passage is really a parable, with its imagery taken from the supposed scenes of the after-life. It has to be treated on the same principles as the other parables, and the painting is only made for the sake of the subject painted. We must not dwell in an exaggerated way on the details of the picture, but seek for the 'point of impression,' for the sake of which the picture is painted, the parable is given.

The chapter, along with the previous chapter, forms one of our Lord's complete discourses. It was addressed precisely to His disciples. It was designed to prepare them for the commotions, and contentions, and calamities which were speedily coming upon them,

and which would certainly have a testing power upon their Christian profession. Our Lord, in His application, points out the three things in Christian life concerning which they should be supremely anxious, and warns them that, under temptation and pressure, they may fail in one or the other of these. If they are to stand in the testing times that are coming they must (1) keep alive their personal piety; they must (2) be ever faithful to the trusts committed to them; and (3) they must maintain the practical service of brotherhood and helpfulness. The first is evidently the point of impression of the parable of the Ten Virgins; the second is the point of impression of the parable of the Talents; and the third is the point of impression of the parable of the Judgment.

We do not therefore find in the passage any declaration of the absolute condition of judgment at the great Assize, but the effective illustration of the truth that active charity is one of the essential features of Christian life, for which God will always look when He comes to judge and appraise a man's career. Our Lord was constantly teaching that a Pharisaic pride and satisfaction in *pious sentiments* was utterly suitable in His disciples. A key-note of His teaching, one which He sets forth and illustrates in this parable, was this—'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them.' This parable of the Judgment is a pictorial enforcement of the duty of practical godliness. It only need be added that comparatively small and insignificant things are mentioned, upon the well-established principle that 'a straw shows how the wind blows,' and small things are the best revealers of real character.

## The Commendation of the Unjust Judge.

LUKE xviii. 6 : 'And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.'

**Question.**—*Does not our Lord's approval of what this unjust judge did in this case put us in some peril of approving of this unjust man?*

**Answer.**—It does, if we assume that our Lord invented this case as an illustration; but it does not if we take the more natural assumption that our Lord was describing a case which had actually occurred, and occurred recently. If our Lord described a case, we understand that He would describe it truthfully, and say the judge was a bad man when he was bad. Difficulty has been made by treating as a 'parable' what was an actual incident.

If we use facts for illustrative purposes, we are not at liberty to alter facts; nor are we bound to more of the fact than we use for

our purposes of illustration. We can illustrate good qualities from bad men, and so could our Lord. Nobody misconceives us as praising the men's general badness when we single out for notice some act of cleverness, kindness, and wisdom. And so we should never force our Lord's words to mean a general commendation of a man because he did a right thing under a particular pressure. Our Lord would not have so forcibly described the badness of this unjust judge, if He wished us to approve of him.

Moreover, the judge is quite a secondary person in the narrative. Our attention is fixed on the 'importunity' of the poor widow, and this alone is commended to us. 'Lest they should grow slack, He reminded His disciples that their whole frame of mind should be one of habitual devotion, that they might not become faint-hearted, and give way before the trials they might have to suffer, or at the seeming delay in His coming.'

*Dean Plumptre* takes quite a fresh view of the passage. 'May we not think that here, as elsewhere, there is an intentional assumption by our Lord of a standpoint which was not His own, but that of those whom He sought to teach. Even His disciples were thinking of God, not as their Father, who loved them, but as a far-off King, who needed to be roused to action. They called on Him in their afflictions and persecutions, and their soul fainted within them, and they became weary of their prayers. Might not the parable be meant (1) to teach such as these that from their own point of view their wisdom was to persevere in prayer, and (2) to lead them to reconsider the ground from which they had started? And the one result would, in such a case, lead on almost necessarily to the other. Prayer has a marvellous self-purifying power, and the imperfect thoughts of God in which it may have had its beginning become clearer as it continues. It is one of the ever-recurring paradoxes of the spiritual life, that when we are most importunate we feel most strongly how little importunity is needed.'

*Trench* says, 'None but the Son of God Himself might have ventured to use this comparison. It had been overbold on the lips of any other. For, as in the parable of the Friend at Midnight, we were startled with finding God compared to a *churlish* neighbour, so here with finding him likened to an *unrighteous* judge. Yet we must not seek therefore to extenuate—as some have been at great pains to do, and by many forced constructions—his unrighteousness; but, on the contrary, the greater we conceive that to have been, the more encouragement does the parable contain, the stronger the argument for persevering prayer becomes. If a bad man will yield to the mere

force of the importunity which he hates, how much more certainly will a righteous God be prevailed on by the faithful prayer which He loves.'

## The Sin of Forethought.

MATTHEW vi. 25 : 'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.'

**Question.**—*Wherein lies the precise distinction between the duty of forethought and the sin of forethought ?*

**Answer.**—The confusion of two quite separate things is caused by the one word being used with two distinct meanings. It is a duty so to anticipate the future as to prepare ourselves for its duties and emergencies. It is a sin to worry about the future, as if He who has always provided would not be sure always to provide. But the force of our Lord's counsel strictly applies to His disciples, and not to everybody. He spoke to those who had received His revelation of the Fatherhood and Fatherliness of God : to those in whom He had striven to nourish the spirit of trustful children. Children in homes, overshadowed by good fathers, may have all the joy of thinking about and preparing themselves for the morrow ; they may sing, as *Jean Ingelow* makes her fourteen-years-old girl—

'I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,  
Not one, as he sits on the tree ;  
The bells cannot ring it, but long years, O bring it !  
Such as I wish it to be.'

But it would be most dishonouring to their father, if they fretted, and were anxious about the morrow, as if he would fail to arrange, provide, and keep. Jesus set a little child in the midst of anxious disciples, and glorified for ever child-trust when He said, 'Except ye be converted, and become as this little child, ye cannot see the kingdom of heaven.'

When the earlier versions of the New Testament into English were made, the expression 'to take thought' signified what we now mean by such words as vexing, worrying, fretting, being anxious, full of care, and the like. This is its meaning in our translation. But, like many other words and phrases which have fallen out of common use, 'taking thought' has become obsolete.

*Dr. S. Cox* says, '*Forethought* is no more forbidden than thought. A wise man, a man with "discourse of reason," *i.e.*, a man in whom reason is not dumb and inert, must "look before and after." There would be no unity in his life, no continuous development and activity,

no linking on of month to month, and year to year, if he did not look forward and scheme for the future as well as the present. What Christ forbids is so looking onward to to-morrow as to cloud to-day ; so anticipating the future as to darken the present. And this is the very point at which we commonly fail. . . . It is our needless fears, our groundless anxieties, which undo us. Now it is from this pernicious habit of "borrowing trouble from the future," as though we had not enough of it in the present, that Christ would save us. "Trust in God for the future," He says ; "do your duty to-day, and leave to-morrow with Him. And let this trust be your tranquil haven, your harbour of refuge, whenever the waves of care run high."

### Blinded Minds.

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 14 : ' But their minds were hardened : for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth unlifted. (*Rev. Ver.*) (Compare : 2 THESS. ii. 11.)

**Difficulty.**—*If men are stricken with incapacity by Divine judgment, surely their personal responsibility must be taken away ?*

**Explanation.**—What has previously been said in relation to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, will be found to apply to this case. A condition of hardened heart is a condition of *judgment*. It has become no longer a question of the man's responsibility. God has taken the man in hand ; he has been arrested, tried, sentenced, and is actually undergoing judgment ; that judgment falling on his mind and will. Properly speaking, the question of personal responsibility can only apply to a person who is free in society ; it does not apply to a prisoner undergoing his sentence, and shut up in prison. The only point which it may be difficult to admit is that God brings His judgment on men, and on races, *in this life*. We have too readily shifted all the Divine judgments into the world to come.

In the time of St. Paul, the Jews, as a race, were under Divine penalties, and one form of penalty was a judicial blinding. The Jews now still lie under the same disabilities, and, so far as the race now existing is concerned, it is not responsible for its rejection of Christ. Its state of antagonism to Christ is its race-judgment : it is judicially deprived of all those privileges and blessings which the knowledge of Christ as Messiah involves.

But we must distinguish between the responsibility of a *race* and the responsibility of the *individual* to whom the claims of Christ may be directly presented. His race-disability becomes to him personally

only one of the arguments on one side of the question which he has to decide. A man's private and personal responsibility cannot be lost, even when the responsibility of the nation or race to which he belongs has passed into judgment.

If this distinction should seem somewhat subtle, we ask for it a careful and candid consideration, as we feel that it provides the key to some of our most perplexing moral problems. Perhaps no subject submitted to human consideration is more difficult to treat fairly, to unwrap from its complications, and to judge in its true bearings, than that of the relations of race-peculiarities, race bias and prejudice, to individual responsibility. We cannot escape from the influences of heredity for good and for evil; we cannot excuse our personal decisions by an appeal to hereditary disabilities: and in the case of the blinded Jews, we may see simply an intense case of heredity, which is, in reality, a case of race-judgment.

### Tests of Sincerity.

MATTHEW xix. 21 : 'Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'

*Difficulty.*—*Our Lord appears to have put this young ruler to an unreasonable strain; and all tests of sincerity must be adapted to the person tested.*

*Explanation.*—*A. L. R. Foote*, of Brechin, in a very sympathetic consideration of this incident from the side of the young ruler, efficiently meets the difficulty. 'We sometimes hear it said that the sacrifice demanded of him was great, unfair, unreasonable—as compared, at any rate, with others. Natural sympathy is keenly awakened in his behalf; and we ask, How should we like to have the same sacrifice demanded of us? And certainly, upon the mercantile theory of salvation—upon the principle of bargaining with God, and purchasing eternal life with our own labours or our own liberality—such a sacrifice, if made at all, would be made with a grudge. But upon the other principle, that eternal life is the free gift of God through Christ, without any merit on our part—on this principle there is no surrender which the awakened soul will not willingly make in order to obtain an interest in the Saviour. It was not his riches that stood in the way of an entire surrender of himself to Christ, but his love of them. And it was this that made the sacrifice of them so painful to him. Had he been keeping his wealth in its own place—not idolizing it, not setting his heart upon it—he would have been able to part

with it without a pang ; in fact, it is more than doubtful if the actual surrender would have been required of him at all.

‘We are not to suppose that, when our Saviour said, “Yet one thing thou lackest,” He meant to intimate that this was the only thing wanting to constitute that perfect legal righteousness on the footing of which he might merit the high reward of eternal life ; this would have been encouraging him in his delusions. In order to understand such language, we must look at it from the side of the ruler. Here, the Saviour is again, as appears to us, taking him up very much on his own ground. The case is put, you will observe, hypothetically, as before—“If thou wouldst be perfect.” It is as if He had said, “Thou aimest at perfection, and on the footing of this thou art looking for eternal life ; thou indulgest the dream of human perfectibility. Well, I will put thee here to the test : sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor. What ! dost thou hesitate ? What, then, becomes of thy favourite doctrine of perfectionism ? Ah ! thy fond idol is dashed to pieces, and by thine own hand, too ; and wilt thou still indulge in such a golden dream ? Is this all the length thy doctrine of human perfectibility can carry thee ?” If—an important qualification this—if thou wouldst be perfect ! Who can fail to see a delicate yet severe irony here ? The Saviour is not teaching the doctrine of perfection in any sense here, but is trying to wean him from a theory which was deeply rooted in his mind, and which was exercising so prejudicial an influence over him.’

Regarded in this way, the strain put on this young ruler was not unreasonable. The demand made was designed to break down the wall in which he was encasing himself, and, strong as it was, it did not prove strong enough to secure the end desired. His case required such a sifting, severe, trying method.

*Farrar* reads the character of the young ruler somewhat differently. ‘Jesus gave him one short crucial test of his real condition. He was not content with the commonplace ; he aspired after the heroical, or rather *thought* that he did ; therefore Jesus gave him an heroic act to do.’

*Dr. C. Geikie* says : ‘The demand, great though it seems, was exactly suited to the particular case. It was a special test in a special instance, though underneath it lay the unconditional self-sacrifice and self-surrender for Christ required from all His disciples. It could not fail to bring the young man to a clearer self-knowledge, and thus to a wholly new conception of what true religion demanded. The only way to lead him to a healthier moral state was to humble him by a disclosure of weakness hitherto unsuspected. He had fancied

himself willing to do whatever could be required ; he could now see if he really were so. He had thought he cared for nothing in comparison with gaining heaven ; he could now judge for himself if he had not erred.'

*Dean Plumptre* skilfully relieves the apparent unreasonableness of our Lord's demand. 'It would be altogether a mistake to see in this either an obligation binding on all seekers after eternal life, or even what has been called "a counsel of perfection"—a precept laying down an indispensable condition for all who aim at its higher forms and powers. It was strictly a remedy for the special evil which hindered the young ruler's progress to perfection, applicable to others so far only as their cases are analogous. It would be idle to deny that there have been and are many such analogous types of character ; and so far as anyone is conscious of being under the power of wealth and its temptations, so far there is a call to some act asserting his victory over those temptations, in the spirit, if not in the letter, of the command thus given. But it is, we must remember, the spirit, and not the letter, which is binding.'

### Divisions caused by Christ.

LUKE xii. 51 : 'Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth ? I tell you, nay ; but rather division.' (Compare Matt. x. 34, 35.)

**Difficulty.**—*If Christ is the cause of division, the responsibility of it must surely rest with Him, and not with us.*

**Explanation.**—It was a characteristic feature of our Lord's teaching that He used 'paradoxes' for the purpose of awakening thought. Great thought-leaders and teachers of new truth usually recognise the value of 'paradox' as an element of popular instruction. By it we understand a sentiment or proposition seemingly absurd or contradictory, yet true in fact, or at least suggesting the truth. It may sometimes be the over-presentation of one side of truth, for the very sake of starting criticism, and suggesting some other and neglected side. Something of this kind we find in this passage. Our Lord states a bold and striking fact : division and contention follow on His coming ; and He sets us thinking about the connection between these two things.

It will be found that we are accustomed to use the word 'cause' very inexactly. The philosophical meaning of the term is not the popular meaning, and there are several differing senses in which a person or an action can be spoken of as a cause. When one event follows another, we very readily say that the earlier is the cause of

the later, when it may be nothing more than the antecedent, or one link in a chain of causes. The result which follows our conduct may be quite other than we desired, and in such cases we are the mere 'occasion'—we are not the 'willing cause.' So in the case of our Lord, divisions, family and social contentions, were the actual, the historical results of Christ's coming; but these were not the ends which Christ set before Himself—these were not the results which He desired. He was *accidental* cause, not *willing* cause, of such things. He wills 'peace' for man; but His will works in a disordered world, and against man's will for himself, and the result is conflict. What a man does, and what a man aims to do, are often quite different things; but in common and popular language a man is fairly said to be the cause of what actually results from his action.

It bears precise relation to the case of our Lord if we point out that the divisions followed upon the fact that His manifestation of Himself in the world differed so materially from the expectations of Messiah which the Jews almost universally entertained. They looked for a nobler Judas Maccabæus; Christ came as a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' They wanted a leader who should break off from their nation the Roman yoke. Christ came as One who 'bore their infirmities,' healed their diseases, and forgave their sins. The difference was so great that it inevitably led to diversity of opinion about Him, and heated dispute concerning Him.

'The internal connection of the passage seems to be something like this. The imminent future is very critical. The object of Christ's coming was to awaken in men's minds a spiritual excitement which would disturb and divide the world, producing not peace, but a sword, so much so that He Himself would suffer in the course of the conflict which His own teaching had aroused.'—Speaker's Commentary.

*Renan* says that 'everything fertile (in results) is rich in wars.' And round by and through the very contentions which Christ's coming arouses His kingdom of righteousness and peace comes on.

## The Permanence of Evil.

REVELATION xxii. 11: 'He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him be made holy still.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Can it be argued from this passage that, after the restitution of all things, evil will still remain?*

**Answer.**—It cannot be assured that the subject dealt with in this chapter is the 'final restitution of all things.' It may even be

fairly disputed whether the Book of Revelation is in any sense historical. It is so manifestly a teaching by symbols and prophetic figures, that we do not wisely associate with it a chronological order. Its scenes may be synchronous in many cases, descriptive of what occurs in different parts of the earth. It may even not be descriptive at all, but suggestive of moral and immoral forces and of varying Divine judgments. Without attempting to explain what the Book of Revelation is (though we may deal with it in a subsequent section of this work), we may with confidence affirm that the meanings of it are too uncertain for us to build perplexing doctrines upon it. And certainly, to conclude that evil will continue after the final issues of the great redemption are reached, and to base that conclusion on the passage now before us, would be wholly unwarranted.

Apart from preconceived and biasing notions, the reference of the passage would seem to be a very simple one. John is bidden not to 'seal up the sayings of the prophecy of this book,' because the time of closing up, though at hand, is not *come*; and until it does come, preaching and prophecy must be agencies working amongst men. The evil will be going on in their evil, and need warnings; the good will be growing better through much struggle, and so will need much encouragement. The very point is that there is no fixity yet, and so for everyone there is hope. The passage is really an echo of the parable of the Tares. 'Let both grow together until the harvest,' even if it should seem to you that the harvest is close at hand. The verse before us is rather a statement of fact than a direction of conduct, or a prophecy of the future; and this is indicated by the correction of the Revised Version.

The results of the preached Gospel are always such as described here: 'to some it is a savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death;' but we must go on preaching it, even if the apparent issue be a confirming men in sin.

*Bishop Boyd Carpenter* takes a somewhat different view. 'What does the verse mean? Does it mean that the time is so short that it is hardly sufficient to allow of men reforming themselves so as to be ready for their Lord, and that therefore the lesson is, Let those who would be ready for Him remember that *now* is the day of salvation? This is the view adopted by some; it contains a truth, but the meaning of the verse seems more general. Is it not the declaration of the ever-terrible truth, that men are building up their destiny by the actions and habits of their lives? "Sow an act—reap a habit; sow a habit—reap a character; sow a character—reap a destiny." The righteous become righteous; the godly become godly. So,

slowly but surely, may the power of being masters of our fate pass out of our hands. It is in this law of our nature that the key to many of the darkest problems of the future may lie ; and not without a solemn declaration of this law does the Book of Revelation close.'

## Teachings through Destruction of Property.

MATTHEW viii. 31, 32 : ' And the devils besought Him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine. And He saith unto them, Go. And they came out, and went into the swine : and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea, and perished in the waters.'

**Question.**—*How can an incident which seems so contrary to the spirit of Christ be explained ?*

**Answer.**—Several points must be made clear before we can offer the explanation which seems to us most satisfactory. 1. We must recognise that our Lord was justified in teaching through events and symbolic actions. 2. We must distinguish between the *cause* of an event, and the immediate occasion of an event. 3. We should try to understand the human limitations under which the Divine Son was pleased to set Himself, so that, *as a man*, His conduct was not guided by omniscience of result. (There is no point in relation to our Lord which we find it more difficult to get apprehended than the voluntary mental limitations to which He submitted in order to become true man, verily one of us.) 4. We should know the common sentiment of the times concerning swine, which were the types of sensuality, as the fox is for us the type of cunning. On this the following evidence, partly taken from *Kalisch*, may be given : 'Swine are always spoken of in the Old and New Testaments with horror and disgust ; partly on account of their dirty habits, the supposed unwholesomeness of their flesh, their occasional carnivorous ferocity, and, above all, their association with many forms of paganism. The unclean habits of the swine struck the Hebrews so strongly that they gave rise to the saying, "The snout of the pig resembles ambulant dirt." A man wallowing in the last and most disgusting stage of drunkenness was compared with the swine.'

It is interesting to notice that this feeling was not peculiar to the Jews. 'The Egyptians regarded the pig as hateful to sun and moon. They deemed it so singularly contaminating by its uncleanness, unholiness, and all-devouring voracity, unsparing even of its own young, and of men, that any person who had accidentally touched a pig was obliged instantly to plunge into the water, dressed as he was. Swineherds, detested and disgraced, though of pure Egyptian blood, were forbidden to enter any of the national temples, or to intermarry with

any other class or caste; and the Egyptian priests, and all those initiated in the mysteries, rigidly abstained from pork except on one solitary occasion.'

5. We require to have some general idea concerning the so-called 'devil-possession' of the time of our Lord; and especially do we need to consider carefully one view taken of them, which regards them as cases of bodily passion, indulged until, gaining strength, the passion subdues the will, and utterly degrades the man by its ruling. Illustration can be taken from the passion of drink, but the view can be applied to all other kinds of bodily indulgence and passion. A man yields again and again to the desire for drink: every time the resistance of his will becomes feebler, until at length the drink-demon rules, and his triumph is the terrible mania which we know as 'delirium tremens.'

An incident which occurred some years ago at Aldershot was very suggestive in relation to the wild rushing of these swine in the Gospel narrative. Under a terrible impulse of sexual excitement the cavalry horses broke loose, stamped about the camp, then dashed off into the country, leaping and tearing until many were killed and others seriously injured. Had those horses been on the slope of a sea they would have gone into the water just as these swine did.

We can now look at the entire incident. The point from which our explanation starts is that this poor man was suffering from a mania of sensuality, similar to 'delirium tremens' as a mania of drink. This is very clearly and forcibly presented in the narrative as given by Mark (ch. v. 1-8). The man had an '*unclean spirit*.' He went about naked. (Luke says, 'For a long time he had worn no clothes,' ch. viii. 27.) He was rude in his ways, and positively dangerous to females and unpleasant to everybody. Recognising this as his peculiarity, our Lord said, 'Come forth, thou unclean spirit, out of the man.' The swine were the animal symbol of the evil passion from which the man suffered, and whereby he was enslaved.

Then part of our Lord's work of teaching, for this man, for His disciples, and for the people around, might very properly include an impressive exhibition of the abominableness of this spirit and passion. They saw it in the suffering man; it was well they should see it in the beasts. The suffering man would be helped to realize the greatness of his deliverance, as he saw the terrible havoc which the passion which had mastered him made when it mastered the beasts. And we have given us in the recorded story our most terrible warning against the danger of giving way to sensual passion; and a teaching from our

Lord, which the great Apostle puts in formal language thus—‘That every one of you should know how to possess the vessel of his body in sanctification and honour.’ ‘Ye are not called unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.’

The actual destruction of the swine was no design of our Lord’s. It was what we call the accident of the occasion ; the result of the stampede occurring on a steep hillside overhanging the lake.

Though we have not met with this view of the incident fully detailed in any Bible writer, there are two passages in *Trench’s* chapter on the miracle which may be taken as supporting it. ‘It may have been necessary for the permanent healing of the man, that he should have an outward evidence and testimony that the hellish powers which held him in bondage had quitted their hold. He wanted his deliverance sealed and realized to him in the open destruction of his enemies ; not else would he have been persuaded of the truth of that deliverance, and that Christ had indeed and for ever set him free.

. . . . But, again, it may seem strange that the unclean spirits ask permission to enter into the swine, yet no sooner have they done so than they defeat their own purpose, destroying that animal life, from which, if they be altogether driven, they have already confessed they will be obliged to betake them to the more detested place of their punishment. But it is nowhere said that they *drove* the swine down the steep place into the sea. It is just as easy, and much more natural, to understand that against *their* will the swine, when they found themselves seized by this new and strange power, rushed themselves in wild panic and fear to their destruction—the foremost plunging headlong down the cliffs, and the rest blindly following. And be it that the creatures thus rushed themselves to their own destruction, or were impelled by the foul spirits, does there not in either case reveal itself herein the very essence and truest manifestation of evil, which evermore outwits and defeats itself, being as inevitably scourged in the granting of its requests as in their refusal ; which, stupid, blind, self-contradicting, and suicidal, can only destroy, and will rather involve itself in the common ruin than not destroy.’

## The Preaching of Envy.

PHILIPPIANS i. 15 ‘Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife.’

**Question.**—*Can preaching from altogether wrong motives be acceptable to God, or effective in the salvation of men ?*

**Answer.**—This question does not fairly state the position which the Apostle presents. Preaching from altogether wrong motives can

neither be acceptable nor effective. But St. Paul is not dealing with such a case, but with the much more difficult case of a mingling of bad motives with good ones. The fact is, that no man acts from absolutely simple and pure motives—some strands of self-seeking, at least, mingle with the best man's best work; but the question is, How far may the bad motive go without absolutely spoiling a man's work in the sight of God? St. Paul suggests the exercise of a large charity. He is keen enough to see that 'envy and strife' may be almost presiding motives in some of the Christian preachers; but he is willing *not* to see this, if only it is plain that *some* purpose to glorify Christ and save men also inspires them in their service. The Apostle affords an example of that charity which he himself commends for this, that it 'thinketh no evil.'

*Archdeacon Farrar* removes the difficulty suggested by the Apostle's references through a careful study of the connection in which the passage stands. The Apostle is writing in a very confidential way to the friends he loved so well at Philippi. He was at the time of writing a prisoner, but they 'must not suppose that he was the apostle of a ruined cause, or that his imprisonment was a sign that God's frown was on his work, and that it was coming to nought; on the contrary, he wants them to recognise that his misfortunes have been overruled by God, to the direct furtherance of the Gospel. . . . The majority of the brethren had been stimulated by his bonds to a divine confidence, which had shown itself in a yet more courageous daring than before in preaching the Word of God. Some of them preach Christ out of genuine goodwill; but some, alas! tell the story of Christ insincerely, out of mere envy and discord. The former are influenced by love to him, knowing that he is appointed for the defence of the Gospel; the latter announce Christ out of partisanship with base motives, thinking to make his bonds more galling. Perhaps the day had been when Paul might have denounced them in tones of burning rebuke; but he is already Paul the prisoner, though not yet Paul the aged. He had learned, he was learning more and more, that the wrath of man, even in a holy cause, worketh not the righteousness of God; he had risen, and was rising more and more, above every personal consideration. What mattered it whether these preachers meant only to insult him, and render his bondage yet more galling? After all, "in every way, whether with masked design or in sincerity, Christ is being preached; and therein I do, aye, and"—whatever angry feelings may try to rise within my heart—"I will rejoice."

It is thus that the Apostle first tramples on the snake of any mere

personal annoyance that may strive to hiss in his sad heart, and crushes it yet more vigorously with a determined effort if its hiss still tries to make itself heard. He has attained by this time to a holy resignation.'

We can have had but an imperfect experience of life if we have not met with men who are sincere in their service to Christ, but envious or jealous of their fellow-men, and ever raising quarrels among fellow-workers. We are easily tempted to regard those who are unkind towards us as insincere and unfaithful towards Christ; but such an idea is not well founded, and we must freely admit that Christ uses the service of men who are very unworthy in their human relationships.

### Non-Resistance.

MATTHEW v. 39: 'But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.' *Rev. Ver.*: 'Resist not him that is evil.'

**Difficulty.**—*Social order cannot be maintained if a free field is thus to be given to evil and evil men.*

**Answer.**—It should be observed that these counsels were given precisely to the disciples of Christ—to those who were to be race-leaders—first, and therefore model, members of the new kingdom. Examples have to be made striking and impressive. The leaders in all great movements have to be large, extravagant, almost exaggerated. Principles to arrest popular attention must be presented without their due qualifications—bare, striking, looming large.

We see this quite plainly in the commonplace and ordinary affairs of life. To recall the most familiar illustration, there is a delightful extravagance, an entire absence of judicial qualification, in the appeals and demands of temperance advocates or vegetarians. We ought to find no difficulty in recognising that our Lord met the same conditions, and laid down the laws of His new kingdom, and the character and duties of its members, in strong, bold, forcible outline, that should arrest attention and make due impression. The difficulty felt in connection with these 'counsels of perfection,' as they have been called, is greatly relieved when we see that they apply, not to society (save as society gets leavened with the Christian principle), but to those quickened with the new life in Christ, to His disciples and to them just so far as they are 'race-leaders,' 'lights in the world.'

We are familiar with the fact that *first* men and women, leaders in departments of morals, art, or philanthropy, do reach a perfection

which others cannot attain ; we think of them as standards which inspire commoner folk to nobler and higher things. We cannot all be Raphaels, or Taulers, or Bernards, or Fénelons, or Florence Nightingales ; but we can all be better because they were so good. And in the same way our Lord sets the perfect ideal before His first disciples, because they were to go forth into the world and be an inspiration to men, moving them, drawing them up, to an altogether higher plane of purity and charity. To them He says, 'Resist not evil,' that through them He might establish among men mutual consideration and goodwill, knitting men together in the joy of common service. He begins with 'Resist not evil,' because He well knew that if this principle were thoroughly carried out in the world, there would soon be no evil to resist.

But the point now insisted on is that our Lord was not, in this sermon, giving rules relating to the social order, as it is at present constituted. He gives rules for certain individuals—for all, indeed, who stand with those individuals, in a personal relation to Christ. The rules can be applied to society as soon as society is composed of such Divinely renewed men, and not before. But the presence of Christian men in society, who are faithful to Christ's sublime rules, raises the whole tone of society, and touches it with a new gentleness.

A somewhat striking book has been written by a Russian nobleman, giving an account of the entire change of his thought and life from the moment of his accepting the rule 'Resist not evil' as the absolute law of his life and conduct. So far as he is himself concerned, the rule may be safely applied ; but he falls into the error of applying the rule to everybody, whether they have the life in Christ or not. Give us a man who believes in Christ, and this is the rule for him. Give us a society made up of Christians, and leavened with the Christian spirit, and this is the rule for such a society. We will urge Christ's laws wherever men have been won to Christ's allegiance ; but they cannot be applied where Christ's authority is not admitted.

It may be interesting and useful to summarize the various explanations given of this so-called 'doctrine of non-resistance.' In passing, we may note that the Apostle fully entered into the spirit of his Master ; for, pleading with Christians, he says, 'Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to *be defrauded*?' And, advising the young minister, who is to be the example of the Christian spirit, he says, 'The servant of the Lord must *not strive*.'

*Olshausen* says : 'The idea of retaliation (*jus talionis*), which is the foundation of the law in general, is expressed in Exodus xxi. 24. But

the Pharisees made such a use of retaliation, that it could not but become a cloak for revenge and uncharitableness. Christ, on the contrary, conceives the idea in the spirit of the purest love, and derives thence the command of self-denial and resignation. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth," is an eternal law in the government of the world; but love takes the brother's fault on itself, and, by thus becoming like him, causes him to become like it. Thus, out of the *jus talionis* love procures salvation and *forgiveness*, which is nothing but retaliation reversed, and cannot, therefore, exist without the Saviour's suffering. This conquering by succumbing is the essence of the Gospel.'

*Pressensé* takes the line of the explanation which we have suggested. He says: 'After pointing out the conditions of entrance into His kingdom, Jesus traces, in a few words, the noble mission of the new Israel; it is to be the light to lighten the world, and the salt to preserve it from corruption. Then He declares the law of His kingdom, showing that, far from destroying the old covenant, it truly accomplishes it, by supplementing all its imperfections. Instead of lessening moral obligation, He extends it, carrying it into the inner region of the heart. For the law of retaliation He substitutes the great commandment of true charity, which returns benefits for injuries and wrongs. This Divine principle puts to flight all the sophisms of Pharisaic casuistry.'

The older view, which strove to adjust the command of Christ to the exigencies of social order and government, may be represented by the following passage from *John Chrysostom*:—'Let us suppose that the law is entirely cast aside, that all fear of promised punishment is done away with, that the wicked are left to live according to their inclinations, without fear of punishment: adulterers, murderers, thieves, and perjurers. Would not all be overthrown?—would not houses, market-places, cities, lands, seas, the whole universe, be full of iniquity? This is obvious; for if even the existence of laws, fear and threats of punishment, cannot keep the evil-intentioned within bounds, what would there then be to restrain men from evil deeds, if all obstacles were removed? What disasters would then rush in torrents into the lives of men! Cruelty does not lie in leaving the wicked free to act as they please, but in letting the innocent man suffer without defending him.' Chrysostom argues that the law, 'Resist not evil,' cannot be applied to the regular government of society.

*Dean Plumptre* puts the matter very skilfully into a few sentences. 'The principle is clearly and simply this, that the disciple of Christ, when he has suffered wrong, is to eliminate altogether from his

motives the natural desire to retaliate or accuse. As far as he himself is concerned, he must be prepared, in language which, because it is above our common human strain, has stamped itself on the hearts and memories of men, to turn the left cheek when the right has been smitten. But the man who has been wronged has other duties which he cannot rightly ignore. The law of the Eternal has to be asserted, society to be protected, the offender to be reclaimed ; and these may well justify—though personal animosity does not—protest, prosecution, punishment.’

### Lack of Knowledge limiting Guilt.

I CORINTHIANS ii. 8 : ‘ Which none of the princes of this world knew : for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.’

**Difficulty.**—*The Apostle seems to remove the guilt of those who crucified Christ, by presenting for them the excuse of their ignorance.*

**Explanation.**—When ignorance is mere disability, it must be duly considered as qualifying moral guilt. When ignorance is wilfulness or indifference, it must be treated as increasing moral guilt. If St. Paul was thinking of such Gentiles as Pilate, he might fairly urge that their ignorance was disability, and formed a reasonable excuse for their conduct. If he was thinking of the Jewish leaders, he might also fairly urge that their ignorance of Christ was wilfulness and guilt, and formed an aggravation of their conduct. At any given time a man is responsible for acting up to his light ; but it must also be said that every man is responsible for the measure of light which he has at any given time. An illustration may be found in the conscience. That is man’s inward light, but he is responsible for the degree of its illumination.

The guilt of allowing legal forms to aid the malicious designs of evil men—and the guilt of the judicial murder of one known, and admitted, not to be guilty of any crime worthy of death—must rest on Pilate ; but the precise guilt of putting *the Messiah* to death cannot be charged on him, because about Messiahs he knew nothing.

*Professor Radford Thomson* says : ‘ When the Jews and the Roman governor united in effecting the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, neither party to the proceeding can be said to have understood and realized what was being done. The enemies and murderers of the Prophet of Nazareth saw neither the glory of His character and person more than very dimly, nor the glory of His redemption in any measure at all. Jesus Himself had declared, “ They know not what they do ; ” and Paul here says that, had they known the counsels of God, they

would not have crucified Christ. This does not justify or excuse their act, for they certainly knew that they were putting to a cruel death One who was innocent and just.'

From the point of view of merely worldly policy, the crucifixion of Christ was a profound mistake. Martyrdom never effects the objects sought by the persecutors. It tends rather to glorify, in the popular sentiment, the cause for which the martyrs died. 'Not a single calculation of those who compassed the Saviour's death was destined to be fulfilled. Pilate did not escape the emperor's displeasure. Caiaphas (John xi. 50) did not save Jerusalem. The scribes and Pharisees did not put down the doctrine of Jesus.'

The rulers could only put Christ to death while deceiving themselves or deceived as to His character and claims. They could not have put *Messiah* to death. The whole hope of their race centred in Him. But for that very reason their feelings were the more intense against a man of despised Nazareth, who claimed to be the Messiah, and, they thought, dishonoured the very idea of the Messiahship by His imposture. Had they known—had they seen His glory, they too would have bowed the knee to Him, and crowned Him with many crowns.

### The Law of Fair Wages.

MATTHEW xx. 10, 11: 'They likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house.'

**Question.**—*Did the master act fairly in thus giving the same wage for one hour's work as for ten hours' work?*

**Answer.**—The answer is, that the fact of a man's having entered into an agreement with one man provides no adequate reason for his acting even with extravagant generosity to another man. In common life it is perfectly fair to keep the man to his terms who is anxious to make terms, and at the same time to treat another man with generosity who has trusted himself to our generosity. The key to this parable is found in the fact that the labourers early engaged insisted on an agreement; those later engaged trusted the master to give them what was right. The Master can therefore fairly plead, 'Didst thou not *agree* with Me for a penny?' A man is bound to his debts and engagements, but there are no bonds that can bind a man's charity. No doubt the parable was designed to check such exaggeration of 'term-making' and 'wage-fixing' as is in our day destroying the nobler and more trustful relations of capital and labour.

The connection in which the parable stands reveals the fact that it was designed to check the undue confidence and the exaggerated

hopes of those disciples who had been the *first* to follow Christ. *Dr. C. Geikie* says: 'Nothing could have been more fitted to check any tendency to self-importance and pride, so natural in men raised to a position so inconceivably above their original station. Nor was there room, henceforth, for any mercenary thoughts, even of future reward, for the discharge of their duty. They could not forget that, though first to enter the vineyard of the new kingdom, they were yet, so far, on a footing with all who should follow them, that the spiritual worth of their work alone determined their ultimate honour. The special reward promised by their Master was a free gift of God, not the payment of a debt, and depended on their own spirit and zeal.'

*Archdeacon Farrar* says: 'To impress upon them (the disciples) still more fully and deeply that the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of mercenary calculation or exact equivalent—that there could be no bargaining with the Heavenly Householder—that before the eye of God's clearer and more penetrating judgment Gentiles might be admitted before Jews, and publicans before Pharisees, and young converts before aged apostles—He told them the memorable parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. That parable, amid its other lessons, involved the truth that, while all who serve God should not be defrauded of their just and full and rich reward, there could be in heaven no murmuring, no envyings, no jealous comparison of respective merits, no base strugglings for precedence, no miserable disputings as to who had performed the maximum of service, or who had received the minimum of grace.'

*Dr. David Brown* paraphrases the answer of the Master thus: 'You appeal to *justice*, and by that your mouth is shut; for the sum you agreed for is paid you. Your case being disposed of, with the terms I make with other labourers you have nothing to do; and to grudge the benevolence shown to others, when by your own admission you have been honourably dealt with, is both unworthy envy of your neighbour and discontent with the goodness that engaged and rewarded you in his service at all.'

### The Fig-tree Curse.

MATTHEW xxi. 19: 'And seeing a fig-tree by the wayside, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and He saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever.'

**Difficulty.**—*This miracle appears to be an exception to our Lord's rule, that no miracle should be wrought for His own personal ends. This appears to be an expression of personal annoyance.*

**Explanation.**—All single actions done by men, if fairly con-

sidered, are estimated in the light of the general character which they have established. If we come upon a difficult incident, our assumption should always be that the man in this case has acted consistently with his known character ; and we should require very clear and very sufficient proofs before we admit that the action is exceptional, and standing in a painful contrast to the rest of his life.

This principle should guide our judgment of any difficult incident recorded in the life of our Lord. We know Him. We begin every consideration of a new event or action with the confidence that He was self-restrained, He did not give way to passion, and He did not please Himself. It is quite certain that we shall explain nothing in His life satisfactorily unless our explanation runs in fullest harmony with these characteristics.

A teacher—and especially an Eastern teacher—does his work by actions as well as by words. Sufficient illustration of this is found in the stories of the later Jewish prophets, who married wives, hid girdles, made yokes, and did many other things as a part of their prophetic work. So our Lord taught by actions. One day He took a child, and set him down in the midst of the disciples. Another day He walked on the waves. On another He permitted the swine to destroy themselves. And in this incident of the barren fig-tree we have another instance of teaching by action.

It may be also urged that the quick poetical faculty of our Lord, and the quick spiritual faculty, led Him to discern symbols of spiritual truths in everything, even in the simplest things. Everything could be turned to some good account in the training of His apostles for their great life-work.

It was the formal temptation presented to our Lord in the outset of His mission that He should use His miraculous endowments for His own supply, for His own comfort, for securing His own personal ends. That temptation was then resisted and overcome. It recurred again and again throughout His public life, but it was always resisted, and there is no instance recorded in which, if the case be fairly considered, He yielded to use miraculous gifts for personal ends.

The case of the barren fig-tree may look like it, but further study of it brings to view the fact that it bore directly on the spiritual culture of the apostles, and had this for its designed end. At this time every word and every act of our Lord was watched with intense interest. It was a time when He might well put a significance into every act. It was precisely the time in His ministry when He was teaching *by symbols*—by the triumphal entry, and the driving out of the money-changers. The cursing of the fig-tree exactly fits

into the mood and the manner of the period, and we naturally class it with the symbolical instructions. Our Lord saw in it the type of the boastful professor, the virtual hypocrite ; to Him it represented boastful Pharisaism and self-satisfied Jerusalem, so He made it present the further type of the hypocrite's doom, the Pharisee's judgment, and Jerusalem's desolation. This, however, proved too hard for the disciples at the time, so our Lord graciously gave them a simple lesson from the fact that the tree had withered at the word spoken in faith. It is not that mere surface-lesson, but the deeper one of His symbolic act, which has come to the mind, and been stored as the treasure of the Christian ages.

It is not in accordance with the design of this work that an elaborate exposition of the incident should be given ; but the support of good writers to the line of explanation offered may be added.

We naturally turn first to *Trench*, who suggestively says : ' A symbolic action is done *as real*, as meaning something ; and yet, although not meaning the thing which it professes to mean, is no deception, since it means something infinitely higher and deeper, of which the lower action is a type, and in which that lower is lost and swallowed up ; transfigured and transformed by the higher, whereof it is made the vehicle. What was it, for instance, here, if Christ did not mean really to look for fruit on that tree, being aware that it had none ? Yet He did mean to show how it would fare with a man or with a nation, when God came looking from it for the fruits of righteousness, and found nothing but the abundant leaves of a boastful yet empty profession.'

*Neander* says almost all that need be said on the subject. The proper light in which to regard this act is its symbolical character. ' If the miracles generally have a symbolical import, we have in this case one that is *entirely* symbolical. The fig-tree, rich in foliage, but destitute of fruit, represents the Jewish people, so abundant in outward shows of piety, but destitute of its reality. Their vital sap was squandered upon leaves. And, as the fruitless tree, failing to realize the aim of its being, was destroyed, so the theocratic nation, for the same reason, was to be overtaken, after long forbearance, by the judgments of God, and shut out from His kingdom. The prophets were accustomed to convey both instructions and warnings by symbolical acts ; and the purport of this act, as both warning and prediction, was precisely suited to the time. But to understand Christ's act aright, we must not conceive that He at once caused a *sound* tree to wither. This would not be in harmony with the general aim of His miracles ; nor would it correspond to the idea which He designed

to set vividly before the disciples. A sound tree, suddenly destroyed, would certainly be no fitting type of the Jewish people. We must rather believe that the same cause which made the tree barren had already prepared the way for its destruction, and that Christ only hastened a crisis which had to come in the course of nature. In this view it would correspond precisely to the great event in the world's history which it was designed to prefigure: the moral character of the Jewish nation had long been fitting it for destruction; and the Divine government of the world only brought on the crisis.'

The connection of the incident with some of our Lord's previous teachings is skilfully presented by *Dean Plumptre*. 'From the lips of one of like passions with ourselves, the words used by Christ might seem the utterance of impatient disappointment. Here they assume the character of a solemn judgment, passed not so much on the tree as on that of which it became the representative. The Jews, in their show of the "leaves" of outward devotion in the absence of the "fruits" of righteousness, were as that "barren tree." But a few weeks before (Luke xiii. 6), He had taken the fig-tree to which "a man came seeking fruit and finding none" as a parable of the state of Israel. Then the sentence, "Cut it down," had been delayed, as in the hope of a possible amendment. Now, what He saw flashed upon Him in a moment (if we may so speak) as the parable embodied. . . . The sentence which He now passed on the tree, and its immediate fulfilment, were symbols of the sentence and the doom which were about to fall on the unrepentant and unbelieving people.'

### Making Friends through Mammon.

LUKE xvi. 9: 'And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*If this is what it seems to be, a counsel of selfish expediency, is it not altogether unworthy of the Lord Jesus Christ?*

**Answer.**—Our Lord's words are not to be taken seriously. We need have no difficulty in accepting the fact that our Lord used 'irony' as a method of instruction; and a careful observation of the connection in which this passage stands shows that our Lord was searching out, humiliating, and almost raising the laugh against the conceited and hypocritical Pharisees. In verse 14 it is carefully noted, that 'the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided Him,' evidently feeling the keenness of His irony.

The ironical character comes out in the close of the sentence. We

feel at once the absurdity of wealthy friends securing for us eternal tabernacles ; and so we understand Christ to mean that 'making friends for ourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness' is exactly what we should *not do* if we are His disciples. This unjust steward is a warning in every sense, and not in any sense an example. A warning most of all in this, that when he fell into trouble, he did not trust God or wait upon Him, but set himself upon getting out of his trouble by selfish, mean, and wicked expedients. The parable becomes perfectly clear if thus the meaning is discerned which underlies its ironical form.

Hesitating to associate the ironical with Christ, as if it were in itself something evil, Biblical writers labour very hard at harmonizing this with other teachings of our Lord. A few specimens may be given.

*Olshausen* thinks the sense of the words is obviously this : 'Employ the unrighteous mammon in making yourselves friends with as much prudence as that steward did in the circumstances in which he was placed.'

*Dean Plumptre* takes Christ seriously, and explains, 'The right use of wealth in helping the poor, making men happier and better, leading them to repentance and to God, will gain for us friends, perhaps the very persons whom we have helped, perhaps the angels of God who rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, perhaps even Christ and the Father, who will receive us into "everlasting habitations."'

*The Speaker's Commentary* takes the view that our Lord here commends kindness to the poor ; and it quotes *Oosterzee* in support.

*Luther* says : 'It is a sermon on good works, and especially against avarice, that men abuse not wealth, but therewith help poor and needy people.'

*Archdeacon Farrar* thinks the parable was given 'to show the disciples the necessity of care and faithfulness, of prudence and wisdom, in so managing the affairs and interests and possessions of this life as not to lose hereafter their heritage of the eternal riches. With the supreme and daring paradox which impressed His divine teaching on the heart and memory of the world, He urged them to the foresight of a spiritual wisdom by an example drawn from the foresight of a criminal cleverness.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* follows the line of those who see a commendation of charity in the parable. 'Fit yourselves, by labours of love and deeds of true charity, as My followers, to become fellow-citizens of the heavenly mansions, with those whose wants you have relieved while they were still in life.'

## The Christian Idea of Punishment.

2 CORINTHIANS ii. 6, 7 : 'Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.'

**Question.**—*Must the Christian idea of punishment be restricted to Church relations, and to sins cognizable by the Church; or may it be applied to the common social and governmental relations of men?*

**Answer.**—The Church is not the world; and until it is its laws and rules cannot be strictly applied beyond its own limits. But the Church is the ideal society. It is what the world should be; what the world is to be. So its principles, its rules, its treatment of its various members, are the ideal principles, rules, and dealings, which ought to be widely known and accepted, and ought to regenerate society. The Christian idea of punishment is the perfect idea; but it cannot be perfectly and universally accepted until the whole relations of men are lifted up into the Christian plane. It is the *right*, but the *expedient* must rule until men are ready for the right.

This general answer will be supported by the Christian idea of punishment, as so finely given by *F. W. Robertson*, of Brighton. 'It includes, first, the reformation of the offender. This is the first and most natural object of punishment; and we infer it to have been part of St. Paul's intention, because when this end had been attained, he required that punishment should cease; "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment." Now herein consists the peculiar spirit of Christianity, that whereas the ancient system of law sacrificed the individual to society, and feeble philanthropy would sacrifice society to the individual, Christianity would save both. It respects the decencies of life and its rights; it says the injurer must suffer; but it says, too, he also is a living soul, we must consider him,—we must punish so that he shall be made not worse, but better. So it was not only the dignity of the Corinthian Church that St. Paul thought of: he thought also of the fallen, guilty state of his spirit who had degraded that Church. He punished him that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

'The second thing included in this idea is the purification of society. Punishment was also necessary for this reason—that sin committed with impunity corrupts the body of men to which the sinner belongs. This St. Paul declares in the First Epistle: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Now the purification of society

is effected partly by example, and partly by removal of the evil. The discipline by which this removal was effected was called excommunication. At that time, apostolic excommunication represented to the world God's system of punishment. I do not say that it does so *now*, for the Church and the world have become so mixed, Church and State so trench upon each other's functions, that we know not where the division is. But I conceive that in early times the Church discipline was representative of the true idea of punishment: clearly St. Paul thought so. He did not think of extending it beyond the Church; for his idea of the Church was that of a pure society in the world, representing what the world should be; and so he does not require this separation to be rigidly enforced with respect to worldly men. For God judged those without, while the Church, God's representative, judged and exhibited this principle of punishment on those within.

'These two—to reform, and to serve as an example—are the only views of punishment which are found in the popular notion of it. But if we think deeper on the subject, we shall find, I believe, that there is another idea in punishment which cannot be lost sight of. It is this—that punishment is the expression of righteous indignation: God's punishment is the expression of God's indignation; man's punishment is the expression of man's indignation. There is a right feeling in human nature which we call resentment: it exists equally in the best and the worst natures; although in the worst it becomes malice. It existed in Christ Himself, for it is not a peculiarity of *fallen* human nature, but it is an inseparable element of human nature itself. Now let us mark what follows from this: Man is the image of God: all spirits are of the same family. So there is something in God which corresponds with that which we call resentment, stripped, of course, of all emotion, selfishness, or fury.

'It is for this reason that we should strongly object to explain away those words of Scripture, "the wrath of God"; "God is angry with the wicked every day"; "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven." These sayings contain a deep and awful truth. God's punishment is God's wrath against sin; and is not merely the consequence of lifeless laws, but the expression of the feeling of a Living Spirit. It would be most perilous to do away with these words; for if the wrath of God be only a figure, His love must be but a figure, too. Such, therefore, is the true idea of human punishment. It exists to reform the offender, to purify society, and also to express God's and man's indignation at sin.'—*Lectures on Corinthians*.

## The Law of Final Judgment.

MATTHEW x. 15: 'Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.'

**Difficulty.**—*Can it be right to make judgment depend on privilege, seeing that privilege is dependent on God's sovereign will, and not on anything man can do?*

**Explanation.**—This difficulty rests on somewhat narrow and dogmatic views of what the 'final judgment' is. The judgment of those to whom Christ has been offered may take cognizance simply of the acceptance or rejection of the offer. But this condition of judgment cannot be applied to all mankind; it cannot be made the test of those who lived before Christ came, nor of those who have lived and died, or do still live, without any knowledge of Him. Old Testament Scriptures express the terms of universal judgment in the words, 'Thou renderest to every man according to his works.' And New Testament Scriptures are in perfect harmony with the Old; for we are told that 'we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'

A notion has been allowed to grow up amongst us, and to get established, that the results of final judgment are only two—acceptance or rejection. Our minds are almost unable to admit that there will be varieties, precisions, and adaptations in the judgments announced. And yet our Lord clearly laid down the principle of variety when He taught that those who knew not their Lord's will should be beaten with few stripes.

In the variation and precision of the final sentences lies the explanation of this difficulty, as it is above stated. If judgment were not carefully adjusted to each case, due account of the circumstances of each individual need not be taken. The sin of men is weighed and considered in the light of their surroundings and their opportunities. No man is responsible for his privileges or his disabilities, any more than for his birth. What has to be discovered is the character which finds, or has found, expression in conduct under such and such circumstances; and the all-wise God can duly appraise, and fairly deal with, the precise measure and weight of guilt in each case. Duly considering the moral guilt of Sodom and Gomorrah in the light of their times and knowledge, and setting over against it the moral guilt of the people of Palestine in the light of their times, knowledge, and opportunities, it is clear to everyone that a heavier condemnation ought to rest on the Christ-despisers of Palestine.

The moral trial of a varied race renewing itself through long generations involves an infinite variety of testing conditions and circumstances. Some of these it pleases us to consider 'privileges,' and others we call 'disabilities.' But they really are no more than various conditions of moral trial, some causing lighter and some heavier strain. Judgment will surely take into due account the various degrees of strain, and, if we may use business terms, in every case produce a 'net result.'

If we were explaining the text rather than meeting a difficulty, we should point out that our Lord is not stating a fact, but illustrating a principle, and using a strong figure in His illustration. As a fact, Sodom and Gomorrah, as a nation, had already been judged, condemned, and appropriately punished; and our Lord's reference to it really amounts only to this: 'It shall be more tolerable for such a sinner, or sinful people, as the Sodomites were, in the day of judgment than for that city.' Sodom and Gomorrah, in fact, stand for and represent a class.

### Relation of Christianity to Slavery.

**1 CORINTHIANS vii. 20, 21:** 'Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. Wast thou called, being a bond-servant? care not for it: but if thou canst become free, use it rather.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand from this that St. Paul recognised slavery as a permissible social arrangement?*

**Answer.**—Yes, this much must certainly be admitted, whatever further difficulties may seem to be involved in the admission. The horror of slavery is a Western, not an Eastern, sentiment. St. Paul was not socially above the age in which he lived, and we cannot expect him to have fully seen how the great Christian principles of equality, brotherhood, and charity would gradually come to change social customs. The Bible nowhere attacks slavery; but the Bible reveals principles and truths which create a sentiment altogether opposed to slavery, and must eventually destroy it from off the face of the earth.

To deal with this question fairly, we must realize the very important distinction between patriarchal and tribal slavery and the slavery of civilized lands and times, such as that of Rome or the American States. Patriarchal slavery is best represented by that personal relation in which his retainers stood to a Scotch lord or a feudal baron. That was not an ideal relation, but it was not a hardship or a degradation. And St. Paul deals with slavery from a distinctly Eastern point of view. He must, however, have been also familiar

with the terrible condition in which the slaves of the Romans were found. In view even of the suffering which led Onesimus to escape from his master, St. Paul requires his return, his submission, and the re-acceptance of his obligations.

The position which St. Paul took, and consistently held, appears to us to have been this : Jesus Christ gives a new *life* to men—a new soul-life. He did not come to alter social relations, to change governments, or to introduce a new order. He planted principles. He revealed truths. He quickened life. Let the life grow into power, and find expression, and it will surely correct social errors, tone the spirit of governments, and bind men together in mutual helpfulness and in the bonds of ‘heavenly divine charity.’ But do not force it. Life wants freedom ; life wants time. Slavery and war will both fade away, but only as men accept the principles and truths of Christianity, and give room for the growth and the spread of its influence in society.

St. Paul had to deal with this practical difficulty. The sense of privilege and dignity, which those have who know the new life in Christ, naturally makes them restless if their outward circumstances are those of inferiority and disability. The freeman in Christ Jesus would very naturally desire to be a freeman in daily life, free from the bonds of any earthly master. Now, to take the very lowest ground, it would seriously imperil Christianity if it became manifest that the results of the spread would be a struggle of the slave-class for freedom. The one plea which the early Christians could urge against their enemies was, that their religion in no way interfered with business or society or government. It was an inner life, altogether separate from the external life of association.

On the abstract wrong of slavery, and on the practical evils of slavery, as we know it, we hold strong and decided views ; but it is quite unreasonable for us to attribute such views even to the most enlightened of Christian teachers.

Some very wise and suggestive remarks on this subject, and on that of war, are made by *Professor W. Griffiths, M.A.* ‘In the time of our Saviour society was far from being in a position to do away with either slavery or war. Constituted as the Roman empire was, could not have subsisted a single day without the support of the sword. Nor could the social fabric have escaped a shock bordering on collapse, if the custom of holding property in man had been suddenly discontinued. And, since the Divine method of improvement for us is that of enlightened reform, not violent revolution—the evolution of truth from within, not the convulsion caused by power

working from without—it was necessary to suffer the evils of war and slavery to go on afflicting the body politic, yet roughly holding its parts together, until men should grow wise enough to adopt the only rational means of internal welding and external defence. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the Bible tolerated these institutions in the sense of *letting them alone*. Even Moses introduced regulations for softening the hardships of slavery and abating the horrors of war. And that the word of God is essentially opposed to the enthralling of innocent persons, and to their wholesale slaughter on the field of battle, is provable, not only from the general tenor of revelation, and the spirit which it fosters, but also by the unequivocal result of Scripture influence, when it becomes dominant and has opportunity for full manifestation. Christianity has already chased slavery out of its fairest domains, and is engaged in following up the diabolical system to its last retreats. The abomination, as a recognised custom, will soon be swept from the face of the globe.’

The *Rev. T. T. Shore, M.A.*, deals fully with the attitude which the Apostle of the Gentiles maintains towards the great question of slavery. ‘While there were many points in which ancient slavery under the Greek and Roman governments was similar to what has existed in modern days, there were also some striking points of difference. The slaves at such a place as Corinth would have been under Roman law, but many of its harsher provisions would doubtless have been practically modified by the traditional leniency of Greek servitude and by general usage. . . . Still, the master could sell his slave as he could sell any other species of property; and such a state of things was calculated greatly to degrade both those who trafficked and those who were trafficked in, and was contrary to those Christian principles which taught the brotherhood of men, and exalted every living soul into the high dignity of having direct communion with the Father.

‘How, then, are we to account for St. Paul, with his vivid realization of the brotherhood of men in Christ, and his righteous intolerance of intolerance, never having condemned this servile system, and having here insisted on the duty of a converted slave to remain in servitude?’

‘One point which would certainly have weighed with the Apostle in considering this question was his own belief in the near approach of the end of this dispensation. If all existing relations would be overthrown in a few years, even such a relation as was involved in slavery would not be of so great importance as if it had been regarded as a permanent institution.

‘But there were other grave considerations of a more positive and imperative nature. If one single word from Christian teaching could have been quoted at Rome as tending to excite the slaves to revolt, it would have set the Roman power in direct and active hostility to the new faith. Had St. Paul’s teaching led (as it probably would, had he urged the cessation of servitude) to a rising of the slaves, that rising, and the Christian Church which would have been identified with it, would have been crushed together. Rome could not have tolerated a repetition of those servile wars which had, twice in the previous century, deluged Sicily with blood.

‘Nor would the danger of preaching the abolition of servitude have been confined to that arising from external violence on the part of the Roman Government; it would have been pregnant with danger to the purity of the Church itself. Many might have been led, from wrong motives, to join a communion which would have aided them in securing their social and political freedom.

‘In these considerations we may find, I think, ample reasons for the position of non-interference which the Apostle maintains in regard to slavery. If men, then, say that Christianity approved of slavery, we would point them to the fact that it is Christianity that has abolished it. Under a particular and exceptional condition of circumstances, which cannot again arise, St. Paul, for wise reasons, did not interfere with it. To have done so would have been worse than useless. But he taught fearlessly those imperishable principles which led in after-ages to its extinction. The object of Christianity—and this St. Paul over and over again insisted on—was not to overturn and destroy existing political and social institutions, but to leaven them with new principles. He did not propose to abolish slavery, but to Christianize it; and when slavery is Christianized, it must cease to exist. Christianized slavery is liberty.’

## SECTION II.

### DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO EASTERN CUSTOMS AND SENTIMENTS.

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#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

IN no department of Biblical study has so much fresh knowledge of permanent value been obtained in recent years, as in that of Bible antiquities, including the manners and customs of Eastern races. Missionaries, such as Thomson and Van Lennep, resident for many years in Syria and Asia Minor, and Egypt, and other related countries, have carefully observed the daily habits and the common speech of the people, and kept their records for our use. Passing travellers, trained to notice all national and geographical peculiarities, and skilled in collecting accurate information concerning the flora and fauna of Bible lands, have given us their very varied and interested accounts ; and practised writers have set all this new material in direct relation to Bible texts, so that we have at command a vast storehouse of illustration of Bible incidents and Bible expressions, and with their help we can often gain fresh and eminently satisfactory explanations of Bible difficulties.

As an indication of the good and helpful things that may be obtained from modern literature, we give one instance from the Old Testament and one from the New.

There is a figure used in Psalm lxxviii. 13, which must seem to a Western, with ordinary Western associations, as extravagant, if not, indeed, unnatural. The words of the passage are, 'Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. But *Miss Whately*, in her 'Ragged Life in Egypt,' describing some of the sights witnessed from the flat roofs of the houses in Cairo, says : 'The roofs

are usually in a great state of litter, and were it not that Hasna, the seller of *geeleh*, gets a palm-branch and makes a clearance once in a while, her roof would assuredly give way under the accumulation of rubbish. One thing never seemed cleared away, however, and that was the heaps of old broken pitchers, sherds, and pots, that in these and similar houses are piled up in some corner; and there is a curious observation in connection with this. A little before sunset, numbers of *pigeons* suddenly emerge from behind the pitchers and other rubbish, where they have been sleeping in the heat of the day, or pecking about to find food. They dart upwards and career through the air in large circles, their outspread wings catching the bright glow of the sun's slanting rays, so that they really resemble shining 'yellow gold'; then, as they wheel round, and are seen *against* the light, they appear as if turned into molten silver, most of them being pure white or very light-coloured. This may seem fanciful, but the effect of light in these regions is difficult to describe to those who have not seen it; and evening after evening we watched the circling flight of the doves, and always observed the same appearance. It was beautiful to see these birds, rising clean and unsoiled, as doves always do, from the dust and dirt in which they had been hidden, and soaring aloft in the sky till nearly out of sight among the bright sunset clouds.'

*Miss Agnes G. Weld* reminds us of an Eastern custom, which very freshly and effectively illustrates the concern of the woman who had lost one of her ten pieces of silver. (See Luke xv. 8-10.) 'The women of Bethlehem, and of other parts of the Holy Land, still wear a row of coins sewn upon their head-dress, and pendant over their brows. And the number of the coins is very commonly *ten*, as I, in common with other travellers, have ascertained by counting. The custom reaches back far beyond the Christian era. In all probability, therefore, it was not simply a piece of silver which was lost out of her purse by the woman, but one of the ten precious coins which formed her most precious ornament.'

*Miss Lydia Von Finkelstein* improves upon this by treating this ornament as the distinctive mark of the married woman, and answering, in the Eastern woman's imagination, to our wedding-ring. The ornament was so constructed that if one piece was lost the whole was in danger of falling apart. It might be necessary to send it a long distance, involving serious delay, to get a new piece fitted; and while the woman was without it, she would be unable to leave the house, or to receive visitors, for fear of being seen without her sign of marriage. This makes very reasonable her excessive anxiety in searching for

the lost piece, and the joy she is represented as showing when the piece was found. It seems that this particular ornament was commonly spoken of as the 'ten pieces.'

In this section of the 'Handbook' only such passages are dealt with as present difficulties to thoughtful readers, which may be removed, or, at least, relieved, by some knowledge of ancient and Eastern manners and customs, or by some acquaintance with the prevailing sentiments of the Jewish people at some particular period in their history.

The cases that are treated in this section are to be regarded as *specimens* of the value and the use of such knowledge of Eastern life and thought. It would not be possible, within reasonable limits, to attempt to deal with *all* the difficulties which may be included in this class. It will suffice if sufficient instances are given to show how the enlargement of our knowledge of Bible lands and times at once relieves the Sacred Word of much that has been puzzling and almost incomprehensible, and suggests the importance, to Bible readers and Christian teachers, of studying all books that help to re-create the scenes and interests and characters of bygone ages. The Old Testament, and much also of the New, can only be read aright with the dictionary help of competent knowledge of the differing but ever-interesting East.

One case has recently come to our knowledge, in which accuracy of knowledge of Eastern custom puts new force into a figure which can be illustrated from ordinary everyday life. Hosea (ch. vii. 8) speaks of Ephraim as 'a cake not turned.' *Dr. Lansdell*, travelling in Russian Central Asia, records the following: 'Yakoob explained to me how they bake the bread; namely, by making cakes of dough about the size and thickness of a captain's biscuit, and then, clapping this on the side of the oven, where it sticks till one side is done, the same process being repeated with the other side. Hence a half-hearted person, as Ephraim, is a 'cake not turned.'

## DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO EASTERN CUSTOMS AND SENTIMENTS.

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### King Og's Bedstead.

DEUTERONOMY iii. 11 : 'For only Og, King of Bashan, remained of the remnant of giants ; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron ; is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon ? Nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.'

**Difficulty.**—1. *Are not both the size of the bedstead and its manufacture of iron so unreasonable that the narrative must be regarded as legendary ?*

2. *How did the bedstead come to be preserved in the Ammonite city of Rabbath ?*

**Explanation.**—There is undoubtedly a constant tendency to exaggeration in the reporting of things that are only remembered : and we find that things with which we had to do in our childhood seem in after-years bigger to us than they actually were. We are often surprised when we can test our imagination, and our memories, by the reality. This no doubt applies in an especial manner to such stories of giants as affect the young and untrained imagination. Making all due allowance for such a tendency to exaggeration, we may see what evidence there is for the reasonableness of the figure that is given to us of Og and his bedstead.

There is sufficient evidence of the existence of a gigantic race in the district with which Og was associated. Under the name of Rephaim they are mentioned in Gen. xiv. 5 ; xv. 20. But the measurement of the so-called bedstead of Og does not give us a precise idea of the size of the man. Taking the cubit at the ordinary size, one foot and a half, the bedstead was an enormous one—thirteen and a half feet long and six feet wide. We may, however, reasonably suppose that it was much longer and wider than the body, and

perhaps was purposely made to produce an exaggerated impression of Og's size, as *Leclerc* tells us that Alexander the Great had the beds of his foot-soldiers made larger than was necessary, in order to impress the Indians with an idea of the extraordinary strength and stature of his men.

The true explanation of the passage appears to be that it was the sarcophagus, and not the bedstead, of Og which is referred to. He was buried in an immense block of black basalt, a substance which the Arabs still call iron, because it contained a large percentage of iron. A man whose actual stature was from eight to ten feet might very reasonably have a sarcophagus of fourteen feet length. Napoleon III. is buried in a solid block of granite, which is not less than ten feet long; and Squire Beckford, of Fonthill fame, lies in a similar size block at the Lansdown Cemetery, Bath; but both these were men of quite ordinary height. *Sir J. Chardin* and other travellers have observed the ancient tendency to make mummies and tombs far larger than the natural size of men, in order to leave an impression of wonder.

*Kitto* elaborately explains the ancient use of bedsteads made of metal; but as the original terms, *eres barzel*, may without question be rendered 'a sarcophagus of basalt,' we may accept this very simple and satisfactory solution of the difficulty.

It is hardly possible to account for the preservation of the sarcophagus at Rabbath. It is not unlikely that Og, when wounded in battle, fled, and found shelter in Rabbath; there he died, and was buried in an honourable way, as a great king. The report of the immense size of his sarcophagus might very readily have come to the ears of the Israelites, and it would impress them with the importance of the victory they had won over so mighty a giant and so great a king.

The *Speaker's Commentary* remarks that 'modern travellers have discovered in the territories of Og sarcophagi as well as many other articles made of the black basalt of the country.'

## The Divine Origin of Circumcision.

GENESIS xvii. 10: 'This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised.'

**Question.**—*Are there not proofs of the adoption of this rite by other nations beside the Hebrews, and independently of them?*

**Answer.**—There are reasonably good grounds for admitting the use of this custom quite apart from the special injunction to Abra-

ham ; but this may be freely admitted, if we properly apprehend the Divine purpose in making it the sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

In a note to his interesting work, *Hours with the Bible*, vol. i., p. 344, Dr. Cunningham Geikie gathers up the facts and arguments on this point. 'Wilkinson has found proof of the practice of circumcision in Egypt as early as the fourth dynasty, that is long before Abraham (vol. v., p. 318). There is also an instructive painting of the time of the oppression of the Jews in Egypt, showing the mode of performing the rite. Nearly all mummies, moreover, are circumcised (*Ebers*, p. 233). The Jews circumcise on the eighth day ; the Mahometans, properly on the thirteenth year, as the time when Ishmael was circumcised. The rite has been found widely practised where it might have been least expected, among the negroes of the Congo and many African tribes, including the Caffres ; and also in the Fiji Islands, among the Indians of Central America, the ancient Mexicans, and other Indian races. Curiously, the *Speaker's Commentary* (vol. i., p. 122) and *Land and the Book* (p. 590), not knowing the evidence of the Egyptian monuments, suppose that the priests of Pharaoh learned about circumcision from Joseph. The remark of Michaelis is acute, that if Abraham had not already known about it, more minute directions would have been given him. *Ebers* (p. 233) says that in Egypt, as among the Hebrews, "uncircumcised" was equal to "unclean" ; "circumcised," to "clean" or "pure."

The testimony of Herodotus is important, but his statements are somewhat loose and unsatisfactory. He says that the Egyptians and Ethiopians had circumcision from the most remote antiquity, so that he cannot tell which had it first ; he mentions the Colchians as also using it, and says that the Phœnicians and Syrians in Palestine admit that they 'learned this practice from the Egyptians' (Herod. ii. 104). It is, however, difficult to recognise precisely who Herodotus refers to as the Syrians and Phœnicians.

Effort has been made to show that all other nations may have derived the rite, directly or indirectly, from the Jews ; but this cannot be sustained. It is most unlikely that other nations would allow such an insignificant nation as that of the Jews to teach them any rites ; certainly not any so offensive and so painful as this one. And the historical facts plainly intimate that an existent custom was divinely enjoined upon the Jews, with a view to the associations in which as a nation they were to be placed.

For the Hebrew circumcision was not designed to separate God's people from the Egyptians, but from the *Canaanites*, among whom Abraham dwelt at the time of institution, and whose country Israel

was ultimately to possess. We have sufficient evidence that the Canaanite nations were *not* circumcised. 'One tribe of Canaanites, the Hivites, were uncircumcised, as appears from the story of Hamor and Shechem (Gen. xxxiv.). To the Philistines the epithet "uncircumcised" is constantly applied. From the great unwillingness of Zipporah to allow her son to be circumcised (Ex. iv. 25), it would seem that the Midianites, though descended from Abraham by Keturah (Gen. xxv. 2), did not practise the rite.' (*Smith's Bib. Dict.*)

The idea that the Hebrew custom was borrowed from the Egyptians is said by F. W. Newman, in *Kitto's Cyclopædia*, to have given much offence; but he wisely adds: 'In truth the question involves no peculiar difficulty; it is only part of another far wider inquiry. It is notorious that many other ancient nations had various ceremonies and institutions in common with the Jews, and that the Hebrew law is by no means in all points original. That sacrifice pre-existed is on the surface of the Bible history. The same, however, is true of temples, tabernacles, priests, ever-burning fire, oracles, etc. The fact has often been denoted by saying that the Jewish institutions are a selection, revision, and re-enactment of an older patriarchal religion.'

The analogy of the bow in the cloud, existent before, but constituted a divine sign and suggestion to Noah, may be applied to circumcision as enjoined on Abraham.

A brief explanation of the religious significance of the rite to the Hebrews may be added. 'To Abraham and his posterity circumcision was an abiding sign of consecration to God, and of admission into the congregation of Jehovah. The nations around them had their distinctive forms of dedication to their idols, in the fanciful trimming of their beards and hair, forbidden so strictly to the Jews (Lev. xix. 27), and in the tattooing the sign of a god on the brow, the arm, or the hand, as is still common in the East. But circumcision was much more than this, for it presented the child or the man as an offering to God—a part of the body standing for the whole—and tacitly owned that even life was rightfully His, though redeemed by so slight and typical a substitution. And though in later ages a mark of division and narrowness, in the tents of the early Hebrews it was only a much-needed and abiding badge of separation from the degenerate races amidst which they lived, and of consecration to Jehovah.' (*Dr. C. Geikie.*)

## Boring a Servant's Ear.

EXODUS xxi. 5, 6: 'And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children: I will not go free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.' (See also Deut. xv. 17.)

**Difficulty.**—*Was not this a cruel and degrading custom, unworthy of the Mosaic system?*

**Explanation.**—The cartilage of the ear can be bored without occasioning suffering. And the practice of boring the ear as a mark of slavery is not peculiar to Mosaism; it was quite a common one in ancient times, and observed in many nations.

The arrangement was made by Moses rather in the interests of the servants than of the masters. A master might forcibly detain a servant, demand his life-long service; and if no public ratification of bargains had been required, such a servant would have had no redress. Some public act, and well-recognised mark, secured the rights of the servants. The law said that no servant could be retained over six years (ver. 2), unless a public ceremony took place before the recognised officials in the city gate, where there would be many witnesses, and at that ceremony a permanent mark was made on the servant, by his consent, and by the master's hand. Whether service so secured lasted only until the jubilee year, or for the man's whole life, does not appear from the context.

It should be remembered that, in those days, there were no legal written documents, and therefore all legal proceedings were conducted publicly before witnesses, as is illustrated in the negotiations of Boaz (Ruth iv. 1-12).

An interesting illustration of marking ownership by the boring of the ear may be met with on Dartmoor. The cattle from the neighbouring farms are sent, at certain seasons, to graze on the open unfenced moorlands. There they are placed in the charge of certain herdmen, who receive a tax for each animal, and, on receipt of the tax-money, bore the ear of the animal, inserting, and fastening to the ear, a strand of wool. On certain occasions all the cattle are driven together into an enclosed space or pound; there they are examined, and all found without the mark in the ear are charged with the tax.

Another illustration of sealing service by a ceremony may be found in the recruit's public reception of a shilling from the recruiting sergeant.

The Psalmist uses this requirement of the ancient law as a figure for entire life-devotion to the service of God. It may even express the full consecration of Messiah to His Father's will. (See Psalm xl. 6; Heb. x. 5.)

## Bind the Sacrifice to the Horns.

PSALM cxviii. 27 : ' Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.'

**Question.**—*Does this require something fresh, or is there a reference to some ordinary custom ?*

**Answer.**—The verse is differently translated by Luther, Tholuc and others, who render ' adorn the feast with leaves,' or ' bind on the feast-day branches,' as was usual on the feast of Tabernacles (Le xxiii. 40). It may be observed that the heathen used to strew the altars with green herbs and flowers, particularly vervain. The best authorities, however, support the common interpretation ; but the meaning of the passage is variously given.

*Speaker's Commentary* : ' Bind the victim with cords, and lead it to the altar, to the very horns, to one of which the victim was fastened.'

*Ainsworth* : ' Unto the horns, *i.e.*, all the court over until you come even to the horns of the altar, intending hereby many sacrifices or boughs.'

*Delitzsch* thinks the sacrifices were, on this occasion, so many that they were tied up all over the priests' court, right up to the horns of the altar. The psalm was composed for the dedication of the Second Temple.

*Matthew Henry* says : ' Bind the sacrifice with cords, that, being killed, the blood of it may be sprinkled upon the horns of the altar according to the law ; or perhaps it was the custom (though we read not of it elsewhere) to bind the sacrifice to the horns of the altar while things were getting ready for the slaying of it.'

*Jennings and Lowe* say : " Unto the horns " should be " as far as the horns " . What is meant by binding the sacrificial victim as far as the altar horns is uncertain. The altar in Herod's Temple had, according to the Mishnah, a number of brazen rings on the north side, to which the animals were secured. Presuming that such rings were arranged one above another up to the projecting horns on the summit of the altar, we might interpret this passage to mean that all of them, from the lowest upward, would have to be employed by reason of the multitude of victims. But we do not know that there were such rings on the altar of Zerubbabel's Temple.'

Perhaps *Bishop Wordsworth* finds the most probable explanation of the passage. ' The Hebrew word *chag*, translated *sacrifice*, literally means a *feast-day*. Probably the word is adopted here, because the expression is a figurative one. We do not hear that the sacrifice

re bound literally to the horns of the altar, on which the blood was sprinkled (Ex. xxix. 16; Lev. iv. 7; viii. 15; ix. 9). Nor does it appear to have been possible that the immense number of victims offered on the day of dedication (see Ezra vi. 17) could have been bound. The Targum, indeed, explains the words as meaning, 'Bring the sacrifice bound until it arrives at the horns of the altar.' At this sense seems to be: Bind the *festival* of dedication to the altar of God—that is, Let the joys of all Israelites be concentrated as the joys of one man in a great national act of thankful communion and self-consecration to God. Let the people of God be no more separated from one another by schism, as they were by the severance of Israel from Judah; let them no more be scattered, as they were in Assyrian and Babylonish captivity; but let them all be bound to the centre of unity—the altar of God.'

In view of this explanation of the expression as a figurative one, there is no need for inquiries concerning ancient customs of binding sacrifices to altars, or for the assumption that any new practice was joined. The passage is best treated as a poetical figure.

## The Use of the Ephod.

EXODUS xxviii. 6, 7: 'And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. It shall have the two shoulderpieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof, and so shall it be made together.'

**Difficulty.**—*In the use of the Ephod was not miraculous virtue ascribed to a thing?*

**Explanation.**—The Ephod consisted of two pieces of cloth, one for the back, and the other for the front, joined together by shoulder-straps. Below the arms, probably just above the hips, the two pieces were kept in place by a band attached to one of the pieces.

*Ewald* very carefully describes the Ephod, and suggests both the origin and the right uses to which it was put. Writing of the high priest's robe, he adds: 'Over this long robe a short covering for the shoulders was worn, and this was the first thing which was distinctly sacerdotal. It was a sort of short mantle, termed an *Ephod*—a name which originally signified the same as mantle or covering-th, but which now occurs only in a sacerdotal sense. It simply consisted of two shoulder-flaps, *i.e.*, of cloth, without sleeves, which covered little more than the two shoulders, and did not hang down much below them either before or behind. It simply surmounted, as an ornament, the long robe, from which it seemed almost in-

separable. The two pieces of which it consisted, however, were not separated somewhere under the shoulders, but on the breast and back. At the top, the ends were only slightly connected together. Below, however, they were held together by a girdle, which was certainly very broad, and a main feature of the attire, and without which the state covering would not be assumed. It was different in kind from the girdle of the plain costume, and bore quite another name; it certainly had not the hanging ends, and resembled rather a mere broad band. A covering for the shoulders such as this might also be worn by other priests . . . any priest, or even any man invested with sacerdotal dignity, might wear on his shoulders such a garment made of plain linen. Somewhere about the middle, on the front side of this covering for the shoulders, was attached the bag which in later times has become the least comprehensible article of the high priest's adornment. This bag was the receptacle of the Urim and Thummim. . . . We know, from the early days when the oracle of the high priest was in great repute, not only that the lot was used to finally settle disputes, but that it was regarded as something dependent on heavenly influence. Probably two or three pebbles of different colours were shaken as lots in the "bosom," or bag, and one of them drawn out.'

*Ewald* helps us to understand the Hebrew associations of the Ephod by his account of the Teraphim, or household images. These domestic deities were employed from the earliest times to furnish oracles, so that the word *Teraphim* is absolutely identical with oracular divinity. For this purpose the first addition to the image was an *ephod*, i.e., a magnificent robe put over the shoulders having on its breast a casket containing the lots employed in determining the oracle. In the second place, a kind of mask was placed over the head of the image, in which the priest who was seeking the oracle probably had to perceive by sundry tokens whether the god was willing or not to give an oracle at all at that particular time. These masks alone made the image properly complete, and from them the divinities received their name of Teraphim.'

The passages in which the use of the Ephod needs particular explanation are the following:—Judges viii. 27, which narrates Gideon's making of an ephod, but which evidently means an image clothed with an ephod. Judges xvii. 5, which says: 'The man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.' Here the ephod is clearly the equivalent of oracle. And 1 Sam. xxiii. 9, which tells of David calling upon Abiathar to 'bring hither the ephod,' evidently that he

might inquire of it, as of an oracle. Sometimes 'those that wear the ephod' is employed as a figure for the priestly, or consecrated, class.

It appears that in this God graciously met the common notions concerning oracles, as modes of communicating the Divine will, but put the oracular power into strict conditions, confining it to the high priest, and to him as fully arrayed in his sacerdotal garments. Compare, for illustration, the notion of the Pope's infallibility, *ex cathedra*.

### Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.

DANIEL ii. 31 : 'Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.'

**Question.**—*On what principle of interpretation can this image be explained?*

**Answer.**—The first endeavour must be to understand it as a Divine communication made to Nebuchadnezzar, and bearing direct relation to himself and to his kingdom. Through the first and immediate purpose of a prophetic revelation alone can we hope to apprehend its final and more spiritual applications.

*Rule* vigorously describes the figure which Nebuchadnezzar saw, 'Imagine the colossus towering erect and high, not in a temple, but in an open field. The *torso* would be firmly upright, the arms close to the sides, with the forearms laid on the thighs closed together, and the hands resting on the knees. The throne would be a solid block of iron or stone. The legs close or very near together, so as to be in one piece of iron, and the feet of iron and iron mixed with clay. There was a solemn air of united strength and majesty which no figure less compactly seated could present.'

To Nebuchadnezzar, with his extravagant notions of the grandeur and stability of the kingdom of which he was the head, the vision was a solemn warning, and an assertion of the superior authority and power of the Most High God, who removes nations at His pleasure. We can see three things which would impress the mind of the king. 1. It was then usual to symbolize the power of nations by a human figure; so the image would represent the Babylonian Empire. 2. The succession of ages was represented by different metals, regarded as characteristic of the genius or temper of the age; so Nebuchadnezzar could understand that the immediately succeeding dynasties were referred to, and he must have been depressed by the evident coming deterioration of the empire down to clay. But (3) the point of his trouble was the speedy destruction of the empire by some influence, which was figured as a *sione*. 'This would be, to a Babylonian, sym-

bolical of a destruction by that which was, to him, indestructible. Every edifice, palace, and temple was almost entirely built of brick ; stone was rare. Costly and magnificent as the buildings were, yet from the very nature of their materials they could make but little resistance to time and force. So this image, composed of composite elements, could make no stand against that indestructible power which 'smote to pieces.'

When the first reference to Nebuchadnezzar is firmly and clearly fixed, and the Divine purpose to assert the Divine superiority and absolute rule over all nations is recognised, some attempt may be made to associate the history of the times with the parts of the figure. It is only necessary to remark that, in too minutely fixing prophetic details, the great primary objects of prophetic vision are too often missed. We need to learn, in a thousand varied forms, the lesson here taught the Babylonian king—that no man, and no nation, can ever lift itself above, or swing itself free from, the control of the Most High God. The stone made without hands smashes to destruction all earthly creations that only declare the glory of man.

### Offering Strange Fire.

LEVITICUS x. 1 : 'And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not.'

**Difficulty.**—*Precisely in what did the sin of these young priests consist ?*

**Explanation.**—For the laws relating to the fire used for kindling incense, etc., see Exod. xxx. 7-9 ; Lev. i. 7 ; vi. 12 ; ix. 24 ; xvi. 12. The following suggestions have been made :—1. The fire used by the young priests was not taken from the altar. 2. The incense they used was not mixed according to the law given in Exod. xxx. 34-38. 3. The incense was offered at unusual and unauthorized times. 4. The young priests had lost their self-control through indulgence in drink. This suggestion is based upon the fact that counsels respecting the priests' use of wine follow immediately upon the narration of this incident, as if they had been suggested by it. 5. *Jamieson* thinks it involved their going into the Holy of Holies, and this only the high priest might do. 6. *Bishop Wordsworth* says : 'They were exalted above measure, and tried to free themselves from the ordinary rules of the priesthood ; and possibly their self-willed conduct was due to the excitation of wine.'

Help towards an understanding of the incident may be found by comparing it with two cases occurring in later periods. When David

made a first attempt to bring up the ark to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom, Uzzah paid the penalty for failure in precise obedience to the details of Divine command, and was suddenly smitten, to warn David and his people that it can never be acceptable to God for us to obey Him *in our way*. We must obey Him *in His way*, and with exact and minute observance of His instructions.

The other case is that of Ananias and Sapphira, who were within their rights in their mere act, but were wrong in heart, motive, and purpose, and paid the penalty which surely follows upon self-willed-ness and insincerity.

Uzzah, and Ananias with Sapphira, perished partly on account of their sin, but partly also as a solemn public warning of the Davidic and the early Christian Churches ; and the same appears to be true of Nadab and Abihu. They were smitten for their sin, but they were also smitten, as is pointed out in verse 3, in order that, before all the people, God might be glorified ; as a sense of His demand for careful and precise obedience rested upon them.

There are no materials given us for a certain decision concerning the formal act of sin in Nadab's case. The explanations offered are, at best, but guesses. We may be satisfied to know that it was some evident *informality*, some failure to observe the authorised details of ritual.

We can clearly see that, whether from the excitement of a long and anxious public day, or from a too free use of wine, the young men yielded to the temptation to self-importance and self-will. They set what they thought best over against what God had commanded. Whatever their particular act was, it revealed their spirit. They were failing from the simple, trustful, unquestioning obedience which was pledged in the Covenant. And their failure was so much the worse because they were set in prominent positions, and should have been examples. Their act dishonoured Jehovah before the people, and a solemn vindication of God's claim to absolute obedience became necessary.

The record has been kept to carry this lesson to us : Good moral training of men or of children involves strong dealing with the first and smallest defections from perfect obedience. Neither God nor they who, in their authority, ought to be like Him, can safely pass by wilful disobedience in little things.

## The Den of Lions.

DANIEL vi. 16 : 'Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions.'

**Question.**—*Are there any evidences, in Babylonish history, of the custom of keeping lions?*

**Answer.**—*Layard* says that in Babylonia the lion was and still, is common (*Nineveh and Babylon*, pp. 136, 271, 288); and probably many were kept in dens in the parks or preserves attached to the royal palaces. *Smith's Biblical Dictionary* says, 'The kings of Persia had a menagerie of lions. When captured alive they were put in a cage (Ezek. xix. 9), but it does not appear that they were tamed. In the hunting scenes at Beni-Hassan tame lions are represented as used in hunting (*Wilkinson, Ancient Egypt*, iii. 17). On the bas-reliefs at Kouyunjik a lion led by a chain is among the presents brought by the conquered to their victors (*Layard, Nineveh and Babylon*, p. 138).

*Kitto* speaks of the punishment of casting into the lions' den as being unique, so far as we know, and found only in Babylon. He adds, 'It is remarkable, that the only piece of Oriental antiquity in which anything like a lions' den appears, is in a coin of Babylon. One of the very few pieces of sculpture found at Babylon, however, represents a lion standing over the prostrate body of a man. An engraved den also represents a man combating with or subduing two lions; and at Shus (Susa), not far from the tomb of Daniel, a bas-relief has been found, representing two lions, each with a paw upon the head of a man half-naked, with his hands bound behind him.' 'The region of the Lower Euphrates and the Tigris is now the most westerly part of Asia in which lions remain. We, indeed, never saw one ourselves, but we have conversed with those who did; and we have seen the tracts of their feet; have been at the mouths of their dens, formed in the mounds of ancient ruins of the age of Nebuchadnezzar, and strewed all around with the bones and portions of the hides of sheep, camels, and other animals; and we have been present where their roars were heard.'

No precise description of the dens in which lions were kept can be obtained, but a general idea can be obtained from the following description of a lions' den at Fez, in Morocco, into which Jews and State prisoners were often thrown. 'The lions' den was a large quadrangular hole in the ground, divided by a partition into two chambers. This partition has a door, which can be opened and shut

from above. The keepers of the lions throw food into the one division, and so entice the lions thither; then they shut the door from above, and clean the other division. The whole is under the open sky, and is only encircled with a wall, over which people can look down and in. The Sultan sometimes has men cast in.'

Possibly, if the den was of this kind, the sealed stone which was set up may have been placed before the usual entrance of the keepers. Their way of entrance might otherwise have been Daniel's way of escape.

An interesting proof that lion-hunting was a royal sport in Assyria is given by the late *Mr. George Smith*, who visited the Louvre, and examined the Assyrian collection there. He writes: 'In the Assyrian hall, guarded by the great winged bulls at either entrance, are also some sculptures of Assur-bani-pal—the Sardanapalus of the Greeks. One of them exhibits an adventure which happened to him when hunting. The monarch and his attendants had gone forth in chase of the king of beasts, when—probably while they were beating for their game—a lion rushed out of the cover, and sprang toward the king. Assur-bani-pal, who had dismounted, met the enraged animal single-handed, and taking hold of him by the ear, ran his spear through the body, and despatched him. The scene is depicted with great spirit, and the inscription over it reads as follows: "I, Assur-bani-pal, by my courage on my feet, a powerful lion of the desert by his ear grasped, and in the service of Assur and Ishtar, the goddesses of war, with my spear I pierced through his body."'

The ancient Egyptians used to tame lions and employ them for hunting purposes, and their monarchs are said to have been accompanied in battle by a favourite lion.

## The Claim of the Daughters of Zelophehad.

NUMBERS xxvii. 1-11: 'Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father' (ver. 4).

**Difficulty.**—*Can there properly be exceptions even to Divine rules?*

**Explanation.**—Eastern people make much of the preservation of the family name in a line of sons; and Moses did but fit in with received notions, when he made property in the Holy Land descend only in the male line. It was a rule that usually worked well, but it pressed in an exceptionally hard way in particular cases.

This case is one of great interest. Zelophehad died in the wilderness, but not in any way of judgment upon his unfaithfulness to the Covenant. If he had been one who took part, for instance, in the rebellion of Korah, his daughters would have pleaded in vain against the forfeiture of his property. Those daughters were placed in a difficulty which was not complicated by any side considerations. They simply had no brother to hold the family property, and carry on the family name, and they were in peril of becoming penniless, and dependent on charity, by the passing of their father's property to another branch of the family. They were women of energy and decision, and they pleaded for an exception in their case to the ordinary working of Divinely appointed rule.

In view of the Eastern sentiment about women, their request excites surprise. We cannot wonder that Moses felt he must take the matter directly to God. The response was a gracious modification of the Divine rule ; and an important step in the elevation of women.

With permission to hold their father's estate these women stood in the position of heiresses, and later rules for the marriages of such persons are given in chapter xxxvi. Probably the person marrying the eldest daughter would take the rights and name of the eldest son.

Fathers seem to have had the power to will portions of their estates to their daughters, but Zelophehad had evidently been cut off in some sudden way, without making proper arrangements for his family, who were left in something of the disability of families nowadays, when a parent dies without leaving a will.

The response which Moses was authorized to make in this case clearly illustrates that all rules, human and Divine, must be formulated to meet the general condition. But human and Divine rules must accept the special situations made by calamity, self-will, etc., and so must have precise adaptations. In Divine as well as human spheres the old saying is in great measure true, that 'Exceptions prove the rule.'

### The Use of Trees at a Siege.

DEUTERONOMY xx. 19, 20: 'When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them : for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege. Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down ; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.'

*Difficulty.*—*Seeing that the wood of ordinary fruit trees is of little use for building purposes, was this injunction necessary ?*

**Explanation.**—So great would be the demand for supplies of wood in a prolonged siege conducted on ancient methods, that there would be danger of the ruthless destruction of trees of every kind. The framework, under the shelter of which the soldiers fought, was made roughly of wood-work ; so were the battering rams ; and also the towers, from the top of which stones and arrows could be cast. As the purposes of the besiegers were only temporary any kind of wood would do ; and in the excitement of warfare, soldiers never stay to estimate the permanent value of the things they seize and destroy.

Eastern people are more directly dependent for food upon the fruit-trees than Western people are. The olive, vine, fig, etc., are staple articles ; and the trees which bear such fruits are a long time in coming to maturity. So the thoughtless destruction of them entails suffering and distress for years after the siege is ended ; and the conquerors may themselves have to bear the disability.

The passage has a special interest as illustrating the mercifulness of the Mosaic system, and the early recognition of the necessity for mitigating the horrors and the evil consequences of war. It is but the loss of one year's labour if the harvest of the fields is swept away ; but to destroy the matured fruit-trees is to destroy the harvests of many years.

*Bishop Wordsworth* gives the literal translation of the passage thus :—‘ When thou shalt besiege a city for many days in fighting against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees by forcing an axe against them ; for thou shalt eat of them, and shalt not cut them down, for man is the tree of the field, to go from thy face to the siege ’—‘ that is, man, fed and strengthened by the fruit-trees, can go from thy face to the siege, and take the city, which the trees without man's help cannot do, and he cannot help if he have not food.’

On the passage *Wordsworth* further says : ‘ Perhaps the true meaning is this : Thou art engaged, it may be, in besieging a city ; and thou art wearied with the siege, which has lasted a long time ; yet do not be thereby tempted to cut down the fruit-trees, for thou shalt eat of them ; they shall keep thee to continue the siege, and to bring it to a successful issue ; and in this way, by supplying food, these fruit-trees will be of much more use than they would be by being used as timber in the siege ; for the timber of trees is of little use, if men faint in the siege for want of food, and cannot therefore use the timber of the trees for any good effect.’

In India, and other warm countries, where the people live very much on fruit, the destruction of a fruit-tree is considered a sort of sacrilege.

## The Day for waving the Harvest Sheaf.

LEVITICUS xxiii. 11: 'And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'

**Difficulty.**—*Was this a fixed day, or was it the day when the year's first-fruits were gathered?*

**Explanation.**—The matter is fully dealt with in the *Speaker's Commentary*, and from it the following notes are taken. The opinion of *Wogue* seems, on the whole, most worthy of acceptance.

'The words "on the morrow after the Sabbath" denote the 16th Abib, the day after the first day of Holy Convocation, and this was called *the Sabbath of the Passover*, or *the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread*. The word "Sabbath" is similarly applied to the Day of Atonement in verse 32. That the day in which the sheaf was offered was the 16th of the month, and the "Sabbath" here spoken of was the 15th, is in accordance with the LXX., Philo, Josephus, the Mishna, the Targums, and the Rabbinists in general. The reason of the offering being made on this particular day may have been that the cutting of the sheaf formed a part of the ceremony; and, as the formal commencement of the practical work of harvest (*cf.* Deut. xvi. 9), it was less suitable for the day of Holy Convocation than for the first of the days of less solemn observance, on which, according to Jewish tradition, ordinary work was permitted under certain limitations.—There has, however, been a difference of opinion regarding the day from early times. The Karaite Jews, and the Sadducees before them, held that the name *Sabbath* could denote nothing but the weekly Sabbath, in this place as well as in verse 15. They therefore held that the day here spoken of was the weekly Sabbath which happened to fall within the week of the Passover. It has been imagined in recent times that the commencement of the year and the time of the feast were so arranged that the day of the Paschal Supper, the 14th of Abib, and the last day of the feast, the 21st., coincided with the weekly Sabbath (Hitzig, Hupfeld, Knobel, Kurtz). On this hypothesis, the sheaf was offered either on the 22nd of the month, after the conclusion of the feast (Hitzig, Hupfeld), or on the 15th that is, the first day of Holy Convocation (Knobel, Kurtz). But this arrangement would involve a disturbance of the year, which would end with a broken week, and a still more serious dislocation of the Sabbath-day by no means consistent with its peculiar sanctity, unless we adopt the very unreasonable supposition that the Hebrew year consisted of twelve months of exactly four weeks.—*Wogue* suggests that the

day of the ceremony was not determined with any fixed relation to the Passover, but that it was the day following the Sabbath whenever the barley happened to be ripe, according as the season was later or earlier.'

## Pillows and Armholes.

EZEKIEL xiii. 18 : 'Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls.'

**Difficulty.**—*What strange customs are upbraided in this passage?*

**Explanation.**—We note that the margin for 'armholes' is 'elbows'; and that the 'kerchiefs' are what we know as 'veils.'

The verse is part of a denunciation of false prophetesses. Such persons arose in the later and decaying days of Judaism, and their existence as a class was a proof of national declension into heathen usages. These prophetesses are here described by their characteristic appearance and rites. A peculiar kerchief or veil was worn to make them seem more mysterious and awful: and women of different height or stature put on these veils. Compare T. Moore's poem, in *Lalla Rookh*, the *Veiled Prophet of Khorassan*.

Some render the word 'pillows' as 'cases,' and suppose it refers to cases of leather or parchment containing amulets or charms attached to the sleeves. The word rendered 'armholes' literally means 'joints of the two hands,' but the same word is used in Jer. xxxviii. 12 for *armpits*, which seems to be also the meaning in the passage before us.

The *Speaker's Commentary* gives the three possible explanations :  
 '1. Most ancient interpreters, and many modern ones, have understood the *pillows* and *kerchiefs*, or whatever else these words may denote, as appliances to which the sorcerers had resort in order to attract notice. Among these interpreters there has been much difference whether *pillows* were used for padding or for ornament, or whether amulets and charms were not the things put on—whether these pillows or charms were worn on the shoulder, the elbow, or the wrist—whether again they put on a peculiar head-dress, or a veil, or a mantle, or even a band round the neck. But these questions, for the solution of which we have no certain data, are really immaterial. It is the purpose, not the exact nature, of the appliances with which we have to do.

'2. Others taking the *pillows* and *kerchiefs*, or, as they would say, *neck-cushions*, to be used figuratively, conceive that here a rebuke is intended to such as lull God's people to false security by whispering peace where there is no peace. *Theodoret* (quoted by *Rosenmüller*)

well expresses this view. "By these words are reproved in a figure smooth and easy addresses. For soft cushions for the neck or for the arms bring indeed to the limbs which they support a certain kind of rest and relief, and so smooth addresses, being at the same time false, for a season indeed tickle the ear, but in the end weaken and distort the soul." But this explanation is forced and unnatural.

'3. *Hävernick* sees in the passage a reference, not to the modes of divining, but to the licentious habits of these women luring men to their ruin, like the *strange woman* in Prov. vi., vii. According to him the *pillows* are the soft cushions which they arrange upon their beds of luxury; the *kerchiefs*, or rather 'veils,' are the rich attire with which they deck themselves to catch men.'

*Wordsworth* proposes an entirely new translation. 'Woe to the women that sew coverings upon all joints of My hands;' that is, 'who muffle up the joints of My hands, when I stretch them out in retribution, and who endeavour to hide My arms, which I make bare to punish My people.'

*Gadsby*, illustrating the passage, notes that in Eastern houses there are often most luxurious arrangements made. 'Many indulge themselves by having soft pillows under their armpits, in addition to those against the wall, when they "stretch themselves upon their couches." These pillows, or cushions, are often made, sewn, by the women of the harem.' *Gadsby* thinks the *kerchiefs* were 'charms', such as small shells strung together, and worn as amulets.

The *Revised Version* makes a small change in the first sentence only, reading: 'Woe to the women that sew pillows upon all elbows;' putting in the margin, as an alternative reading, 'joints of the hands.'

## Jewish Conceptions of Cherubim.

GENESIS iii. 24: 'And He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.'

**Question.**—*Are these beings to be conceived by the help of later and Jewish representations of cherubim?*

**Answer.**—It is better to treat this passage as an instance of symbolical teaching, and not attempt to fix a definite form and shape to the beings introduced in it. Its use is to impress on the reader the activity of that aspect of the Divine being which is revealed in this judgment on our self-willed ancestors. These cherubs are the active ministrants of the Divine justice. God vindicating Himself, and guarding His Divine rights, is apprehended by man as cherubic figures keeping the way of the tree of life,

This symbolic meaning appears later on as attached to these beings. Figures of them were placed on either side of the cover of the Ark, which was regarded as the 'mercy-seat.' It may be said that the original meaning of them, the meaning retained and adapted in all later representations of them, was this—they were the ministrants of that justice which ever guards God's mercy.

'This at least is taught us by the cherubim guarding the way to the tree of life. Paradise had been lost by sin; but it was not gone for ever. The tree of life, and the garden where it grew, were still in full glory under the keeping of God, and of His holy angels. The forfeited life is not irrecoverable; but it can only be recovered through fighting and conquest, suffering and death. There were between it and man the ministers of righteous vengeance and the flaming sword.'

*Josephus* says that 'no one can conjecture of what kind the cherubim were.' God's throne is His mercy-seat; but He dwells between the cherubim. Surely this is meant to impress on us that His *mercy* is under the guardianship of His *righteousness*.

'That the sacred tree of Assyria is sometimes guarded by genii is a coincidence with the Bible narrative, which tells of God's placing cherubim "before" Eden, "and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life." These mysterious beings are often mentioned in Scripture. They covered the mercy-seat with their outspread wings; they were represented on the walls of the Temple of Solomon, in the Holy of Holies, and they appear in the visions of Ezekiel. The tradition of their presence in Eden impressed itself deeply on the popular mind in Assyria, reappearing age after age in such forms as the winged bulls with human faces, which guarded the entrances to the Palace of Nineveh. "The watchful bull, which protects the strength of my kingdom, and the glory of my honour," says Esar-Haddon, in an inscription which refers to one of them. Nor is it less striking that they bear the very name of Cherubim or Kerubi, even the gates which they watched coming in the end to be similarly called. That they were regarded as at least symbols of mysterious higher existences, able to protect and preserve what was put under their care, is evident from their place being sometimes occupied by known divinities, and by the fact that a bas-relief, representing the erection of one, under the direction of King Sennacherib, bears on it, after the Divine symbol, the words, "the bull," "the god."'

## Coals of Juniper.

PSALM cxx. 4 : 'Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.'

**Difficulty.**—*What is meant by this expression, and how can it be applied to the false deceitful tongue?* (see verse, 2, 3.)

**Explanation.**—The marginal reading treats verse 4 as an exposition of what the influence of the 'false tongue' is, and proposes to read, 'It is as the sharp arrows of the mighty man, with coals of juniper.'

Writing of the juniper, Thomson, *Land and Book*, p. 611, says: 'What sort of juniper roots can be used for food is more than I can discover or comprehend. They are excessively bitter, and nothing but the fire will devour them. Burckhardt found the Bedawin of Sinai burning them into coal, and says that they make the best charcoal, and throw out the most intense heat.'

As the arrows of a 'false tongue' sharply pierce, so the coals of a 'false tongue' sharply burn.

Some writers treat verse 4 as an answer to the question, 'What shall be done unto thee?' and regard the 'arrows' and the 'coals' as figurative descriptions of the Divine punishments that must come upon the slanderous tongue. This view may be given in the words of Jennings and Lowe. 'The root of the broom (*rethem*, Hebrew, *rôthem*) is still much used by the Arabs for charcoal; it appears to have been noted among the Hebrews as retaining heat longer than other fuel: All (other) coals when they are quenched outside are quenched inside, but these become quenched outside but not inside.' *Ab. Ezra*. The conjunction of coals with arrows here does not warrant a reference to *malleoli*, or flaming arrows; rather, God is conceived of (*cf.* xviii. 12) as casting down actual coals of fire from heaven, upon the heads of these persons.' This is quite the better, and more probable, explanation.

## The 'Cherem,' or Devoted Thing.

LEVITICUS xxvii. 28, 29 : 'Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death.'

**Question.**—*Can this law of devotement reasonably excuse the destruction of human life?*

**Answer.**—While the sanctity of human life is the very foundation of social morality, allegiance to God is a higher rule than it, and in

any case of conflict, human life must yield, rather than the allegiance to God. This relation of the two great rules for humanity is but outwardly expressed in the law of 'devotement.'

It is unfortunate that the term *cursed*, or a *curse*, should be used for the devoted thing. The proper meaning of the *cherem* is that which is cut off from common use, and given up, in some sense, to Jehovah, without the right of recall or commutation. Any live creature so devoted was to be put to death, as the only way in which it could be given wholly—life and all—to Jehovah.

The expectation is, that every vow of devotement should be seriously, thoughtfully, and reverently made, as an act of loyalty and devotion to God. Such rash vows as were made by Saul after Jonathan's victory, or by Jephthah in the matter of his daughter, receive no Scripture commendations; and differ altogether from the destruction of the people of Jericho, or Samuel's hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord.

This subject will be found treated in another section, as presenting a moral difficulty.

## The Trial of Jealousy.

NUMBERS v. 29, 30: 'This is the law of jealousies, when a wife goeth aside to another, instead of her husband and is defiled: or when the spirit of jealousy cometh upon him, and he be jealous over his wife, and shall set the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute upon her all this law.'

**Difficulty.**—*Does not this arrangement involve the Divine approval of trial by ordeal?*

**Explanation.**—It does. And it brings up before us several very interesting and important considerations, such as: 1. The necessity for an adjustment of rules, punishments, and methods of judgment, to the intellectual and social condition, and the moral sentiments, of each particular age. Manifestly modes of administering justice should not be the same in heathen, in tribal, in national, and in civilized societies. And that may be permissible and best in a superstitious age, which could have no place at all in a scientific one. 2. The degree in which the Mosaic system was dependent upon existing customs, and, while adopting them, modified them, and corrected the evil which was found, practically, to attach to them. (Another instance of this is the Mosaic modification of the Eastern system of committing the avengement of murder to the nearest relative of the murdered man). 3. The way in which 'trial by ordeal' has answered its end, not by the test of the ordeal, but by the appeal it made to the conscience of the person submitted to it.

There is also the further interesting but subtle question of the connection of the conscience with the nervous system, and so with health and disease.

*Jamieson* has the following good and sufficient note on this trial by jealousy. 'Adultery discovered and proved was punished with death. But strongly suspected cases would occur, and this law made provision for the conviction of the guilty person. It was, however, not a trial conducted according to the forms of judicial process, but an ordeal through which a suspected adulteress was made to go—the ceremony being of that terrifying nature, that on the known principles of human nature, guilt or innocence could not fail to appear. From the earliest times, the jealousy of Eastern people has established ordeals for the detection and punishment of suspected unchastity in wives. The practice was deeply rooted as well as universal. And it has been thought that the Israelites being strongly biassed in favour of such usages, this law of jealousies was incorporated amongst the other institutions of the Mosaic economy, in order to free it from the idolatrous rites which the heathen had blended with it.'

'The process prescribed has been lately strikingly illustrated from the Egyptian "Romance of Setnau," translated by Brugsch, which though itself comparatively modern (of the third century B.C.), yet refers to the time of Rameses the Great, and may therefore well serve to illustrate the manners and customs of the Mosaic period. "In the story, Ptahneferka takes a leaf of papyrus, and on it copies out every word of a certain magic formula. He then dissolves the writing in water, drinks the decoction, and knows in consequence all that it contained." See Smith, "Pent." i. 297, 298; "Revue Archéol.," Sept., 1867, p. 161. This then, like several other ordinances, was adopted by Moses from existing and probably very ancient and widely spread institutions.'—*Espin*.

## High Places.

LEVITICUS xxvi. 30: 'And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images.'

**Question.**—*Is there not some uncertainty about the Divine dealings with these high places? Sometimes they are sternly denounced, but sometimes they seem to have been permitted.*

**Answer.**—About the Divine will and law in the matter there can be no question. The high places were such sources of peril and temptation that the Jews needed to be guarded from all association with them. But we have, in the actual government of men and

nations, to distinguish carefully between what is legislatively perfect and what is administratively practical. Absolute laws have to be adjusted to the frailties of human life and social relations. And so every nation finds that, under certain circumstances, some of its laws cannot wisely be pressed. It cannot change the law, but it may withhold the action of the law, and permit a seeming disobedience which yet preserves the nation from more serious evils. We may see that as God's rule was a direct rule of fallible men, of a frail, prejudiced nation set in mischievous surroundings, He also may hold His rules in abeyance, and *permit* what He cannot approve. This sufficiently accounts for the Divine disregard of the latter customs respecting the 'high places.'

It may be well to add, briefly, some account of what these were, and now they came to be superstitiously regarded. *Ewald* says: 'The highest summits of the earth have always been deemed places essentially sacred. The high places of the earth had something of a sacred character even for the earliest Jahveism. Just because this religion was utterly unable any longer to find and to hold fast its God in any single earthly object which was visible and could be handled, it was all the more eager and anxious to find the tokens of his existence and activity, at any rate, in heaven and in all heavenly phenomena, and therefore in the clouds which touch the highest and holiest spots of earth. This was a primitive belief, which maintained itself in Israel down to later days, and was not severely shaken until the highest and most illustrious sanctuary of the nation was permanently established on the but slightly elevated Mount Zion, before which the incomparably higher peaks of the earth now seemed to bow their heads for ever.'

*The Speaker's Commentary* says: 'There seems to have been a widely spread tendency in early times to select hills as places for public devotion. The spots which have the oldest religious associations in most regions are on elevated ground. The Acropolis and the Capitol are examples. Most Druidical monuments are similarly situated. The three altars built by Abraham at Shechem, between Bethel and Ai, and at Mamre, appear to have been on heights, and so was the Temple.

'The high places in the Holy Land may have been divided into those dedicated to the worship of Jehovah (as memorial-places), and those which had been dedicated to idols (under the older Canaanite regime). It was contrary to the letter of the Law that sacrifices should be offered at any place except the national sanctuary, whether it was the Tabernacle at Shiloh or the Temple at Jerusalem. But

the restraint took effect only by degrees. The public worship of Jehovah was still permitted at the high places even by kings who desired to serve Him : 2 Kings xiv. 4 ; xv. 35 ; 2 Chron. xv. 17, etc. It would seem as if there was a constant struggle going on. The high places polluted by idol worship were, of course, to be wholly condemned. They were probably resorted to only to gratify a degraded superstition. The others might have been innocently used for prayer and religious teaching as the synagogues were in a later age. But the temptation appears to have been too great for the temper of the people. They offered sacrifices and burnt incense on them ; and hence, thorough reformers of the national religion, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, removed the high places altogether ; 2 Kings xviii. 4 ; xxiii. 5.'

Dean Stanley's description of an ancient 'high place' is too interesting to be withheld (*Jewish Church*, vol. ii., p. 408). 'Beside the Temple worship at Jerusalem, had descended what may be called the rural worship of the 'high places'—at Bethel, at Beersheba, at Moriah, on the mountains of Gilead, at Ophrah, on the hills of Dan, at Mizpeh and Ramah, on the top of Olivet, on Mount Carmel, at Gibeon. They had been sanctioned by the Patriarchs, by Samuel, by David, by Solomon, by Elijah, by Asa and Jehoshaphat, by Joash, and the High Priest Jehoiada, by the four first books of the Pentateuch, if not expressly, at least by implication (Gen. xii. 7, 8, xxi. 13, xxii. 2, 4, xxxi. 54 ; Judg. vi. 25, xiii. 16 ; 1 Sam. vii. 10, ix. 12-19 ; 2 Sam. xv. 32). The 'high place,' properly so called, though doubtless originally deriving its name from the eminence on which it stood, was a pillar of stone, covered, like Mussulman tombs, or like the sacred house of the Caaba, with rich carpets, robes, and shawls. An altar stood in front, on which, on ordinary occasions, oils, honey, flour, and incense were offered ; and, on solemn occasions, slain animals, as in the Temple. Round about usually stood a sacred hedge or grove of trees. Such a grove was allowed to stand even within the Temple precincts. There was a charm in the leafy shade of the oak, the poplar, and the terebinth, peculiarly attractive to the Israelite and Phœnician devotion.

'Innocent as these vestiges of ancient religion might seem to be, they were yet, like the Golden Calves in the northern kingdom, and on exactly similar grounds, inconsistent with the strict unity and purity of the Mosaic worship, and had an equal tendency to blend with the dark polytheism of the neighbouring nations.'

It may be suggested that as memorial places, serving to recall the scenes of early history, the high places were permissible, and were

religiously useful. So far as they were meeting-places convenient for the assembling of the people of a district to engage in religious worship, they might be invaluable, especially in unsettled times, when few could venture to attend the feasts at Jerusalem. But so far as idolatrous associations were retained in connection with them, or incense and sacrifices were offered at them, they put in peril the faith of the people in Jehovah, and stern laws respecting attendance at them were promulgated.

### Tower of the Flock.

MICAH iv. 8 'And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion.'

**Difficulty.**—*Is this a figurative or a proper name?*

**Explanation.**—Some writers treat it as a proper name, belonging to a structure, or the old site of one, known as the 'Flock-Tower,' the same as the 'Tower of Edar,' spoken of in Gen. xxxv. 21, near the encampment of Jacob after the death of Rachel. 'It has been assumed that it was a suburb of Bethlehem, and that its name might have been identified with the abode of David's family, and used as a symbol of the royal line.'

The term may, however, be regarded as a figurative and poetical name for the fortress of Zion, the figure being taken from the custom of erecting towers as shelters and watching-places for those who are employed in guarding flocks. God's people are regarded as a flock watched over from the Tower or Fortress of Zion. This explanation is the one that may be preferred. 'The Flock-Tower is an apt metaphor for the Great Shepherd of the elect people.'

*A. Lapide* says: 'The Tower of the Flock is the Church of Christ, which had its origin in Jerusalem, and to which all nations are gathered, so as to make one flock and one Shepherd' (John x. 16).

*Fausset* says, 'that in large pastures it was usual to erect a high wooden tower, so as to oversee the flock. The prophet Micah had previously referred to Israel as a *flock* (ch. ii. 12), and it is but carrying out the figure to regard the capital city as the tower for the guarding of the flock.'

### The Law concerning Seething a Kid.

EXODUS xxiii. 19: 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.' (See also Exod. xxxiv. 26; Deut. xiv. 21.)

**Question.**—*Why was a special law necessary upon such a matter?*

**Answer.**—There must have been some existing practices, or customs, which Moses regarded as mischievous because cruel, or

because idolatrous ; and commentators have searched for intimation of such customs.

*Cudworth* says : ‘ It was a custom of the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid, and boil it in the dam’s milk, and then, in a magical way, to go about and besprinkle with it all their trees, and fields, and gardens, and orchards, thinking by this means they should make them fructify, and bring forth fruit again more abundantly the following year. Wherefore God forbade His people, the Jews, at the time of their ingathering, to use any such superstitious or idolatrous rite.’ The connection in which this law is given makes this a valuable suggestion. The clause seems to come in most abruptly, but the sentence before it is—‘ The first of the first-fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God.’ When writing of the first-fruits and of the ingathering, Moses seems to have been suddenly reminded of an idolatrous custom which was associated with such times.

The connection of the passage, as found in Deut. xiv. 21, shows that the law was also treated as a rule of diet, and the precept may have originated in the humane feeling of the Jews, and in that sense of the fitness and propriety of things, which is indicated in the rules which forbade the killing of a cow and its calf, or an ewe and its lamb, on the same day ; the taking of an old bird with its nest (Deut. xxii. 6, 7) ; the yoking of an ox and an ass together, etc.

Whether their explanation is the correct one or not, it may be impossible to say, but the Jews explain the precept as the prohibition of a favourite dish of the Arabs. On this, Thomson writes, in *Land and Book*, pp. 94, 95, as follows : ‘ The Arabs select a kid, fat and tender, dress it carefully, and then stew it in milk, generally sour, mixed with onions and hot spices, such as they relish. They call it *Lebn immâ*—“ Kid in his mother’s milk.” The Jews, however, will not eat it. They say that Moses specifically forbade it in the precept, Exod. xxiii. 19, which he repeated three times, and with special emphasis. They further maintain that it is unnatural and barbarous to cook a poor kid in that from which it derives its life. This may have been one reason for the prohibition—many of the Mosaic precepts are evidently designed to cultivate gentle and humane feelings ; but “ kid in his mother’s milk ” is a gross, unwholesome dish, calculated also to kindle up animal and ferocious passions ; and on these accounts Moses may have forbidden it. Besides, it is even yet associated with immoderate feasting, and originally, I suspect, was connected with idolatrous sacrifices. A great deal of learning has been spent upon this passage by critics, to ascertain what the

law-giver referred to ; but after seeing the dish actually prepared, and hearing the very name given to it which Moses employs, we have the whole mystery explained. I have repeatedly tasted *Lebn immá* ; and when well prepared, it has a rich and agreeable flavour.'

## Value set on Birthrights.

GENESIS xxv. 31 : ' And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.'

**Question.**—*What peculiar interest could attach to a birthright that it could be worth selling or buying?*

**Answer.**—The incident becomes intelligible only through acquaintance with Eastern and tribal sentiments and customs. No such bartering of birthrights is conceivable in European countries ; and it should be carefully noticed that the buying and selling of these youths had no practical value unless in some way the exchange could be ratified by securing also the patriarchal *blessing*.

The succession to the chieftainship of a tribe was, in every way, an important matter. The hereditary principle was recognised, but it seems to have been limited by the will of the reigning chief. In the earlier times the birthright involved succession to the father in the rule of the tribe ; claim to the paternal benediction ; a double portion of the father's personal property ; and the position of domestic priest. In this particular instance two things gave special interest to the birthright question, and account for Jacob's anxiety to secure the succession : (1) the fact that Jacob and Esau were twin sons, and (2) the fact that the covenant blessing was conceived to attach to the birthright, for which notion there does not appear to be sufficient ground. Jacob might be the one in the *spiritual* succession, and the proper heir of the covenant, without being absolutely the first-born son.

On the first of these facts Thomson, *Land and Book*, p. 588, says : ' In the case of Jacob and Esau it is also to be remembered that they were twins, born at the same time, and Jacob no doubt felt that his brother had really no valid claims of precedence which should entitle him to the inestimable blessings involved in this instance in the question of birthright ; so also thought his mother.'

Both of the sons were in the wrong. Esau was wrong in undervaluing the right which he seemed to possess. And Jacob was wrong in overvaluing a right on which his covenant position in no sense depended. Esau's indifference came, no doubt, in part from his wild nature. He did not really care for the headship of a merely pastoral

tribe; so we find that he founded a new tribe of enterprising and warlike Arabs. His subsequent anger arose rather from the annoyance of being so cleverly outwitted, than from any serious regret at the losing of his tribal position and rights, which he was unfitted to take up.

The *Speaker's Commentary* has a good note on this subject, from which a few sentences may be taken. 'It is doubtful what privileges the birthright carried with it in patriarchal times. In after-times a double portion of the patrimony was assigned to the firstborn by law (Deut. xxi. 15-17); but in the earliest days the respect paid to the eldest son is very apparent; and as the family spread out into a tribe, the patriarchal head became a chieftain or prince. It also looks as if the head of the family exercised a kind of priesthood. Then the father's chief blessing was given to his firstborn son. Above all, in the family of Abraham, there was a promise of peculiar spiritual privileges, which, if not fully understood, would have been much dwelt upon by believing minds . . . . Jacob had probably looked with reverence on the spiritual promises, though with culpable ambition for the personal pre-eminence of the firstborn. He and Esau were twins, and it may have seemed hard to him to be shut out from the chief hope of his house by one not older than himself, and whose character was little worthy of his position. There may be some excuse for his conduct, but the sacred history, whilst exposing the carnal indifferences of Esau, does not extenuate the selfishness of Jacob.'

### Heathen Body-Markings.

LEVITICUS xix. 28: 'Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*Why was the freedom of the people limited in such an apparently indifferent matter?*

**Explanation.**—In the management of a family, and in the ordering of society, the question often arises, whether a thing that is not wrong in itself can be permitted, because it leads to wrong under particular circumstances, and is injurious in its influence upon others. These body-markings, being heathen customs, exercised a great influence on the ancient Eastern people, and they became serious temptations to idolatry when the Israelites came into direct contact with them. God would guard His people from idolatrous associations, and it was needful to guard against these in their more subtle, as well as in their more open, forms.

It may be well to illustrate the character and extent of these heathen customs of self-mutilation.

*Burder* says: 'The painting of the bodies of eminent personages, or of others upon remarkable occasions, is known to have obtained in countries very remote from each other. Our British ancestors were painted, and *Dampier*, the celebrated voyager, brought over an East Indian prince, whose skin was very curiously stained with various figures. The wild Arabs adorn themselves in this manner, according to *D'Arvieux*, who tells us, among other things in his description of the preparatives for an Arab wedding, that the women draw, with a certain kind of ink, the figures of flowers, fountains, houses, cypress-trees, antelopes, and other animals, upon all the parts of the bride's body. This the Israelites were forbidden to do.

*Van Lennep* writes: 'In some countries, particularly in Egypt or Arabia, a species of tattooing is practised. Small figures in lines are punctured, by means of seven needles tied together, upon the forehead, the cheeks, the lips, the chin, the arms, the middle of the breast; the mark being rendered permanent by the insertion of indigo, or other substances, which gave it a bluish tint. In Persia, the ladies "curiously stain their fair bodies with a variety of fantastic devices, not unfrequently with the figures of trees, birds, and beasts, sun, moon, and stars. This sort of pencil-work spreads over the bosom, and continues down as low as the navel, round which several radiated figures are generally painted."'

'It is not only the custom for mourners to let their hair grow long, and wear it in a disorderly manner, but the bereaved in the East to this day make cuts and incisions in their bodies in mourning for the dead.'—*Dr. Ginsburg*.

### Pourtrayed with Vermilion.

EZEKIEL xxiii. 14: 'For when she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion.' (*The Revised Version* omits the word *when*.)

**Question.**—*Is the prophet's description true to historical fact?*

**Answer.**—'The monuments of Nineveh, recently discovered, show how the walls of its palaces were adorned with figures precisely answering to this description. There is evidence that these sculptures were highly coloured with vermilion, or rather red ochre.'

Writers on India state that the women who have prostituted themselves to the use of the temples are always dressed in crimson or vermillion, and that the walls are covered with paintings of an infamous character.

The colour vermilion was much used in decorating the beams and panels of houses. It was common among the Assyrians for drawing images on the walls of temples, as testified by late discoveries. Idols, according to an apocryphal writer, were painted with vermilion (Wisdom. xiii. 14). It was a pigment made of red ochre.

The prophet Ezekiel is here addressing the exiles, who were familiar with these brightly coloured and attractive idolatrous pictures, and were in grave danger of being allured, by means of them, into idolatrous practices. Rude, high-coloured, exciting pictures have, in all ages, been used as aids to immorality.

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'The language of the prophet here is very strong; and some readers may recoil from it with horror and aversion. It was doubtless designed to excite such feelings as these, and has a solemn and seasonable warning, especially for times like our own, when there seems to be a growing tendency towards a sensual religion in lieu of a spiritual one, and to the scenic pomp of creature worship and idolatry.'

### The Burning Fiery Furnace.

DANIEL iii. 6: 'And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.'

**Question.**—*Is there any historical evidence of this mode of execution?*

**Answer.**—The *Speaker's Commentary* gathers up the testimony from the Assyrian monuments thus: 'Saul Mugina, the king of Babylonia, is recorded as rebelling against his brother Assurbanipal, and making war with him. Saul Mugina was defeated and taken prisoner. He was condemned to death, and, by the order of his brother, was thrown into "a burning fiery furnace." The same fate overtook Dunanu, who had uttered curses against the gods of Assurbanipal, "over a furnace they placed him, and consumed him entirely." The celebrated "Inscription of Khorsabad" records burning and flaying as punishments inflicted on the king of Hamath and his allies (B.C. 714), and a similar fate befell Assourlih (B.C. 712).'

*Chardin* (17th cent. A.D.) says: 'There are other modes of inflicting the punishment of death (in Persia), on those who have violated the police laws, especially those who have contributed to produce scarcity of food, or who have used false weights, or who have disregarded the laws respecting taxes. The cooks were fixed on spits, and roasted over a slow fire, and the bakers were cast into a burning oven. In the year 1668, when the famine was raging, I saw, in the

royal residence in Ispahan, one of these ovens burning, to terrify the bakers, and to prevent their taking advantage of the scarcity to increase their gains.'

The custom is plainly recognised as an established one in Jer. xxix. 22.

Ancient furnaces were made in large holes dug in the ground. For cooking purposes these had stones in them, which long retained the heat, upon which the food could be placed when the flames had subsided. The mode of blowing such fires may be illustrated by the following passage from *Six Years in India*, p. 93: 'A Kuli came and formed a little furnace close to the verandah, by lighting a very small fire of charcoal, making a hole about two feet distant, for the nose of his bellows, which were of the skin of a goat, with a slit at the back which he alternately opened and closed, and connecting the bellows and fire by a little underground passage.'

It is worthy of notice that this mode of punishment was peculiar to the Babylonians, and is illustrated in the Chaldean legend of Abraham's escape from Nimrod's furnace. When the kingdom passed into the hands of the Persians, another mode of punishment, as distinctly characteristic of them, was introduced, that, namely, of casting men alive into a den of lions.

## The Law of Levirate Marriage.

DEUTERONOMY xxv. 5-10: 'If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her,' etc.

**Difficulty.**—*Did not the carrying out of this law involve serious peril to family life and relationship?*

**Explanation.**—The law was designed for a family system, which recognised polygamy as permissible. Monogamy was the Divine idea for the race, but the peculiar way in which various families live together in the East, and form one household, make polygamy a protection against unbridled licence and passion. In Western lands members of families on becoming wives, or on taking wives, remove to new and separate dwellings; but in the East married people remain in the paternal dwelling, which is often composed of grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces; and some careful rules were needed for the due adjustment of the marital relations of each member, and the preservation of the rights and honour of all.

The land of Canaan was divided by lot to the several families composing the tribes, and the portion of land allotted to a family was not to be alienated from it, but was to be kept in the line of the firstborn sons.

But cases of difficulty would be sure to arise ; exceptional cases in which the ordinary working of the law could not be assured, and some modified arrangement became necessary. Such a case is brought before us in this passage. A man, eldest born of a family, and so its heir, may marry and die, leaving no child to preserve his name and enter into his rights. The widow would be in a deplorable case ; taunted by the other women of the household because she had no child ; despised by the men of the household because her failure has imperilled the family estates ; but kept in the family, lest by marrying a stranger there should rise disputes about her first husband's property. Evidently, for her own sake, and for the sake of the family, it was necessary that some arrangement should be made for her within the family so that she might still hope to become the mother of the family heir. The Levirate law was designed to meet the difficulty.

It appears that the law is not peculiar to the Jews, but familiar to Eastern nations. 'It is found in all essential respects the same amongst various Oriental nations, ancient and modern, and exists at present amongst the South African tribes ; amongst the Arabians, amongst the Druses, and amongst the tribes of the Caucasus.' It is characteristic of tribal life that there is great jealousy of marriage outside the limits of the tribe ; and there is no sentiment against unions of those closely related such as we cherish in Western lands.

For the operation of the law in ante-Mosaic times, consult the narrative given in Gen. xxxviii. ; and for an interesting example in the time of the Judges, see Ruth ii. 20 ; iii. 12, 13 ; iv. 1-12.

'The root of the obligation here imposed upon the brother of the deceased husband lies in the primitive idea of childlessness being a great calamity, and extinction of name and family one of the greatest that could happen. To avert this the ordinary rules as to inter-marriage are in the case in question set aside. The obligation was onerous, and might be repugnant, and it is accordingly considerably reduced and restricted by Moses. It did not lie at all unless the brethren "dwell together:" *i.e.* unless they were neighbours. The surviving brother from a distant home was not to be expected to fetch the widow, or perhaps widows and household, and take them to himself. It would seem that the office in such cases devolved on the next neighbouring kinsman ; or perhaps the term "brethren" (ver. 5)

is to be understood in its more general sense as equivalent to "kinsmen."—*Speaker's Commentary*.

'No betrothal seems to have been necessary, and no marriage ceremonies were observed; it was a succession by divine right to the wife, with all the possessions of the deceased to the child, who would be the heir.'

*Dr. Eadie* says: 'The purpose of the law was to preserve the strict entail of property, and to guard the unity of the tribes. The conditions plainly are: there must be property to which the expected child shall "succeed." The brothers must occupy a contiguous tract of territory—"dwell together." The widow must not be past the age of child-bearing, for the purpose of the marriage was to "raise up" a son to the deceased brother's inheritance.'

*Dr. Cox* gives some of the later Jewish modifications of the law. 'When there were several brothers, the Mishna states, that upon the refusal of the eldest, application was to be made to the rest; and if none would comply, the first was obliged either to marry the widow, or to submit to the prescribed indignity. By the Gemara, both the obligation and liberty of marrying the wife of a deceased brother are restricted to the eldest of the surviving brothers. By the practice of the modern synagogue this part of the law is abolished by the rabbis compelling their disciples to refuse compliance with the precept. The ceremony of release from the obligation is performed before three rabbis and two witnesses, after the morning prayers in the synagogue. The man puts on a shoe, and the woman repeats, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother." The brother says, "I like not to take her." Then the woman unties the shoe with her right hand, throws it on the ground, spits before him, and says: "So shall it be done unto the man that will not build up his brother's house; his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.'" The persons present then exclaim three times, "His shoe is loosed." The woman then receives a certificate from the chief rabbi, who declares her at liberty to marry another.'

*Van Lennep* tells us that, 'among Muslims generally, marriage with a brother's widow is simply allowed, and the children born of such a connection enjoy no special privilege. It is, however, worthy of notice that the Mosaic law upon this subject is a mere repetition of a "prior law" already existing among the patriarchs. The only trace now left of such a law among other nations than the Jews is to be met with in the customs of a race of African savages. Bruce relates that among the Gallas, a warlike heathen people, neighbours and

enemies of the Abyssinians, when the eldest brother dies leaving younger brothers behind him, and a widow young enough to bear children, the youngest brother of all is obliged to marry her ; but the children of the marriage are always accounted as if they were those of the eldest brother ; nor does this marriage of the youngest brother to the widow entitle him to any part of the fortune of the deceased. The ground of this law among the Galla tribes appears to have been originally the same as led to the adoption of a similar practice by the Hebrews, among whom the principle of inheritance became an effectual means of preventing the too great accumulation of real estate in an agricultural country, and the prevalence of pauperism. For with those African savages, when a man becomes old, and unfit for war, he is obliged to surrender his whole effects to his eldest son who is bound to give him alimony, and nothing else. These people hold to the rights of primogeniture as strictly as did the Israelites in the olden time, and the Arabs after them until Mohammed, and among some tribes even to the present day ; but the Gallas carry it so far that the eldest son inherits everything, giving to his brothers and sisters only what their father had named as theirs at their birth, with the increase of the same until the time of his death.'—*Bible Lands and Customs*, p. 543.

## The Two Birds of the Healed Leper.

LEVITICUS xiv. 4-7 : 'Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds' (marg. 'sparrows') 'alive and clean, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop : and the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water : as for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water : and he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.'

**Question.**—*Had this ordinance a physical, or only a ritual and symbolical relation to the leper ?*

**Answer.**—It will occur at once to the mind of a Bible student, that there is a marked similarity between the treatment of these two birds, and the treatment of the two goats on the great Day of Atonement. This indeed appears to be a repetition of that ordinance in a small and inexpensive form. But a more careful comparison of the two rites brings to view a marked distinction between them. The goat was killed for sacrifice, but the sparrow was not. And this distinction has led ancient commentators to see in this ordinance no more than a public and formal recognition of the restored health of

the leper. The relation of the various parts of the ceremony to the leper and to his disease is well brought out by Abarbanel.

‘The living bird, according to him, represented the restored vigour and freedom of the vital functions; the cedar-wood, the flesh redeemed from decay and putrefaction; the scarlet, the purged blood giving the hue of health to the complexion; and the hyssop, deliverance from the fœtor which is characteristic of the disease. The details of a restoration to health and freedom appear to be well expressed in the whole ceremony. Each of the birds represented the leper. They were to be of a clean kind, because they stood for one of the chosen race. The death-like state of the leper during his exclusion from the camp was expressed by the killing of one of the birds. The living bird was identified with the slain one by being dipped in his blood mixed with the spring water that figured the process of purification, while the cured leper was identified with the rite by having the same water and blood sprinkled over him. The bird then liberated leaves behind him all the symbols of the death disease, and of the remedies associated with it, and is free to enjoy health and social freedom with its kind.’—*Speaker’s Commentary*.

This explanation is so simple, so reasonable, and so sufficient, that in the light of it we may admit the physical and social, rather than the strictly religious, significance of the rite.

We add two specimens of the way in which the physical bearing of the rite has been passed over, and the incidents spiritualized by the ancient Fathers of the Christian Church. *Theodore* writes in this way: ‘We see here a type of the Passion. As one of the birds was killed, and the other, having been bathed in the blood of the slain bird, was set free, so our Lord was crucified in His humanity for the moral leprosy of the world; and His human flesh suffered death, while the Godhead united itself to the suffering of His humanity. As the leper was made bright when sprinkled with the blood of the slain bird, mingled with living water, with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet, so he who believes in Christ our Saviour, and is washed with the water of Holy Baptism, is cleansed from the spots of sin. The cedar represents the incorruptibility of Christ; the oil poured on the right hand, foot, ear, and head, signifies the consecration of all our members to God’s service. The leper was to be without the camp; the impenitent sinner is to be put out of the Church.’ (Qu. on Levit. 19.)

*St. Cyril* (Glaphyr. in Levit., p. 357) says: ‘The leper is without the camp; so we, when infected with the leprosy of sin, were aliens from the city of God. The priest goes forth to the leper; Christ has come down from heaven to visit us. He has died to save us. This

is what is signified by the two birds. They represent the two natures of Christ. The birds are clean, and Christ is holy. When we read of two birds, let us not dream of two Christs. No! the Only-begotten Son of God took our nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary; but in what manner He, who is truly one person, consists of two natures, the Divine and human, far transcends our power of understanding. The Holy Spirit, contemplating these two natures, speaks of two birds joined together. The cedar is an emblem of the incorruption of His holy flesh. The hyssop is dipped in living water, typifying the water of baptism. The living bird is dipped in the water, in which the blood of the other bird has been received, because one Christ was in death and above death; for "He was put to death in the flesh, and was quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. iii. 18). As far as He was man He endured death, but in that He is the Life He conquered it.'

The comparison of these fanciful and extravagant explanations with the suggestion of Abarbanel helps us to recognise the insight with which the Jewish commentator reveals to us the original and proper significance of the ceremony.

### Unique Covenant Signs.

GENESIS xv. 17: 'And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp, that passed between those pieces.'

**Question.**—*Are there any helps to the understanding of these singular symbolical actions?*

**Answer.**—The only Scripture reference to a similar custom is found in Jer. xxxiv. 18, 19: 'And I will give the men that have transgressed My covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before Me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof.' This passage recalls the fact that 'in making a covenant for the manumission of their Hebrew servants, the men of Jerusalem had passed through the pieces of a calf (either really or figuratively), which they had cut in twain, and said: "If we do not keep the covenant, may God cut us in twain, as this calf is cut in twain." God now takes them at their word, and will execute their own imprecation on their own heads.'

*Burder* records the various references to a similar custom found in Eastern and Pagan literature. 'St. Cyril, in his tenth book against Julian, derives this custom from the ancient Chaldeans. Others derive the word *birith*, which signifies "a covenant," from *batar*,

which signifies to divide or cut asunder, because covenants were made by dividing a beast, and by the parties covenanting passing between the parts of the beast so divided: intimating that so should they be cut asunder who broke the covenant. We find in Zenobius, that the people called *Molotti* retained something of this custom; for they confirmed their oaths, when they made their covenants, by cutting oxen into little bits. For whatever purpose a covenant was made, it was ever ratified by a sacrifice offered to God, and the passing between the divided pieces of the victim appears to have signified, that each agreed, if they broke their engagements, to submit to the punishment of being cut asunder. Herodotus tells us that Xerxes ordered one of the sons of Pythius to be cut in two, and one half to be placed on each side of the way, that his army might pass between them. At the Areopagus, in Athens, the parties concerned in any legal covenant were placed between the severed members of consecrated victims, where they bound themselves and families by a most solemn oath, to the sacred fulfilment of all the stipulated conditions of such a covenant.'

The following illustration is taken from Pitt's *Travels*. 'If they (the Algerine corsairs) at any time happen to be in a very great strait or distress, as being chased, or in a storm, they will gather money, light up candles in remembrance of some dead marabout (saint), or other, calling upon him with heavy sighs and groans. If they find no succour from their before-mentioned rites and superstitions, but that the danger rather increases, then they go to sacrificing a sheep (or two or three upon occasion, as they think needful), which is done after this manner: having cut off the head with a knife, they immediately take out the entrails, and throw them and the head overboard; and then, with all the speed they can (without skinning), they cut the body in two parts by the middle, and throw one part over the right side of the ship, and the other over the left into the sea, as a kind of propitiation.' The ship passes between the parts thus thrown on each side of it.

*Rawlinson* says: 'This form of making a covenant was probably that usual in Babylonia, and thus Abraham received the assurance of his inheritance by means of a ceremonial with which he was familiar. But in most ancient languages men are said to *cut* or *strike* a covenant, because the most solemn formula involved either the cutting of victims in two, or striking them dead, as was the Roman manner.'

The animals which Abraham divided were those which specially formed the staple of Abraham's wealth; they were also those which in after-times, were specially ordained for sacrificial offerings.

*Roberts* well illustrates the using of fire, or a lamp, in the ratification of a covenant. 'It is an interesting fact that the burning lamp or fire is still used in the East in confirmation of a covenant. Should a person in the evening make a solemn promise to perform something for another, and should the latter doubt his word, the former will say, pointing to the flame of the lamp, "That is my witness." On occasions of greater importance, when two or more join in a covenant, should the fidelity of any be questioned, they will say, "We invoke the lamp of the Temple." When an agreement of this kind is broken, it will be said, "Who would have thought this, for the lamp of the Temple was invoked?"'

In the instance before us, God condescends to make a covenant with the Abrahamic race, in the person of its founder and representative, Abraham. Both parties entering into the covenant are present at the solemn ratification of it. Abraham is present in actual person, and takes the covenant by himself passing between the pieces. God is graciously present also, but in His familiar symbol of smoke and fire. He also takes the covenant by moving between the pieces. Each, as it were, takes a solemn vow, like this—'May I be cut in pieces if I fail to keep my part of this covenant!' The condescension of God in thus meeting Abraham as if He were a fellow-man, should be very reverently treated.

### Eastern Sentiment about Women.

ISAIAH iii. 12 : 'As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them.'

**Question.**—*What was the prevalent sentiment about women which explains this figure of speech?*

**Answer.**—There is some basis for the figure in the historical fact that the queen mother, or the women of the harem, virtually ruled during the childhood of a king; but, most probably, the verse reflects the contempt for woman, which was characteristic of ancient times and Eastern countries, and which accounts for the weakness of family life, and the insecurity of the social fabric. In Egypt, in Rome, there was respect for womanhood, and consequently noble family life; but usually in Eastern countries woman is the slave, and not the friend, of man.

*Van Lennep* illustrates the inferiority of woman now in Eastern countries. 'The practice of polygamy, combined with the concubinage of slaves, certainly exerts a more subtle and pernicious influence than is generally supposed. It perverts the relations of the sexes, and separates them, thus depriving each of the wholesome

influence of intercourse with the other. Promiscuous assemblies of men and women are unknown; and even when a crowd collects to see some sight, or gaze at a show, the sexes are always grouped in two distinct and separate portions. A man never walks in the street by the side of his wife or daughter, but when he happens to be out in their company, is sure to keep several paces in advance of them. In speaking of his wife he calls her *his house*, and in conversation with other men prefixes to the word "woman," "wife," or "daughter" (whenever he has occasion to allude to either), the phrase "I beg your pardon," just as politeness requires him to do before mentioning the words garlic, onion, a donkey, or a hog. When a man is absent, and writes to his family, he does not address his letter to his wife, but to his son, though his son may be a babe in his mother's lap. . . . Oriental women are, as a class, remarkably industrious and thrifty. They have the entire charge of the housekeeping, the daughters and daughters-in-law bearing the chief burden, and they wait upon their husbands and fathers even when there are plenty of servants and slaves. Neither they nor the children can sit in his presence without his special invitation. They perform all manner of menial services for him, light his pipe, make and serve his coffee, "minister to him at his meals, setting on meat," pouring water upon his hands, and even washing his feet. He eats in solitary dignity, or in company perhaps with his older sons, after which the women retire to another room to partake of their meal with the younger children.'

*Thomson*, in *Land and Book*, presents this inferiority of women very forcibly. 'Oriental women are never regarded or treated as equals by the men. This is seen on all occasions; and it requires some firmness to secure to our own ladies proper respect, especially from men-servants. They pronounce women to be weak and inferior in the most absolute terms, and in accordance with this idea is their deportment towards them. It is very common to see small boys lord it over both mothers and sisters in a most insolent manner, and they are encouraged to do so by the father. The evils resulting from this are incalculable. The men, however, attempt to justify their treatment of the women by the tyrant's plea of necessity. They are obliged to govern their wives with the utmost strictness, or they would not only ruin their husbands, but themselves also. Hence they literally use the rod upon them.'

*Gadsby* says: 'All the servile work is, in the East, done by women. All women are considered so much inferior to men that they are not even allowed to enter a mosque during the times of prayer. Few pray at all, and those who do are necessitated to pray at home. Ignorance is called "a woman's jewel."'

## The Symbolical Meaning of the Shewbread.

LEVITICUS xxiv. 9 : 'For it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the Lord made by fire by a perpetual statute.'

**Difficulty.**—*This setting up of loaves in the holy place seems to have nothing corresponding to it in later religious services. Can, then, the ritual significance of it be ascertained?*

**Explanation.**—Dr. Miligan, in *Bible Educator*, vol. iii., p. 153, gives the following valuable and satisfactory passage: 'Of the (shewbread) table we say nothing. Its importance is derived entirely from that of the bread placed upon it; and it has no special meaning of its own. We pass at once to the loaves, twelve in number, an offering of the "most holy" kind, "taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant" (ver. 8); above all, "the shewbread" loaves, or, as the words literally mean, the bread of the face, or of the presence. That this "face," this "presence," is that of God, it is impossible to doubt. "Thou shalt set upon the table facebread before my face alway" (Exod. xxv. 30); and again, "For there was no bread there but the facebread that was taken from before the face of the Lord" (1 Sam. xxi. 6). The "face," therefore, spoken of in the term for the shewbread is the face of God, and the bread was so named because it was set immediately before Him in that holy part of the tabernacle where He dwelt. But with what purpose, with what meaning, was it thus set before Him? Two answers have been given to the question: the first, that of those who imagine it to represent something by which the face of God is seen, the heavenly food by the eating of which man attains to the vision of God, and enters into communion and fellowship with Him; the second, that of those who behold in it, not something by which we see God, but something in us for which God looks, those fruits of righteousness in His people which are the great object of His desire, and, when produced as they ought to be, of His satisfaction and joy.'

'The first of these views has much to recommend it, and is capable of being presented in a light at once interesting and beautiful. For the shewbread thus becomes the symbol of Him who is the "Bread of Life," of that Only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, and who "declares" to us that God whom no man hath seen at any time. Partaking of Him, His people "behold God's face in righteousness," and have realized in their own happy experience that in "His presence there is fulness of joy," that "at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore." They are His priestly people, on

whom all the blessings of the covenant are bestowed, and who, therefore, on the Sabbath, that day which is peculiarly the sign of the covenant, enter into the symbolic heaven, and there eat heavenly food.

‘Much, however, as may be said for this view, it appears liable to objections which it is hardly possible to overcome. For, in the first place, the outer apartment of the Tabernacle is not really that part of it in which God peculiarly dwells. He is within the veil, and seeing Him as He is, the sight of Him which is given in His Son, is reserved for that stage in the progress of His Israel when the veil is withdrawn, and they enter into the inmost and most holy shrine. And then, in the second place, the analogy of the shewbread with the other articles of furniture in the place where it stands is thus destroyed. Both the golden candlestick and the altar of incense represent what passes from men to God rather than what passes from God to men, the grace indeed coming first from Him, but afterwards so taking up its abode in them that they shine with sacred light, and fill with the odour of sanctity the apartment in which they live.

‘We must fall back, then, on the second view mentioned, and must see in the shewbread loaves the symbol of those fruits of righteousness which are produced in the lives of the true children of the covenant. These are produced first of all in Christ Himself, whose life embodied every Christian grace and excellence in its most perfect form, who in action exclaimed, “My meat is to do My Father’s will, and to finish His work,” and in suffering, “The cup which My Father hath given Me to drink, shall I not drink it?” whose earthly course was one continual doing good, and His death a returning in faith and hope to the bosom of His Father, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” But, thus produced in Him, these fruits of righteousness are produced also in the members of His body, for they are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, etc. (1 Peter ii. 9). They do not merely shine with the light of Christian knowledge and discernment; they are also faithful in all “good works” (Titus ii. 12-14). Should it still seem to any that thus the eating of the loaves is not sufficiently explained, it has only to be borne in mind that they were an “offering,” that is, in the nature of the case, a meat-offering, and that the same rule, therefore, was applied to them as to all the other meat-offerings of Israel (Lev. vi. 16).

*Ewald* considers the shewbread to ‘have maintained itself in Israel out of an altogether remote primitive age.’ He says: ‘The

simplest mode of offering a sacrifice of property was from the beginning connected with the liveliest wish to prepare therewith something pleasing, some enjoyment for the Deity. Accordingly, the sacrifices which arose in the very earliest times, were entirely furnished as food-offerings; they were presented as meals for gracious acceptance. Man parted with his own most delicious food in order to prepare enjoyment for a higher being, and to draw forth thereby a blessing over the earth; and when he received this blessing from Mother Earth, thankfulness drove him to make ready a portion of the superabundance for a similar food-offering. Exactly in this way the custom arose among certain nations of Western Asia and Europe, of setting out, at a sacred spot, a magnificent table, and replenishing it from time to time with choice provisions. A trace of this custom remained also in Israel down to later times.'

*Dr. Cunningham Geikie* gives the meaning of the shewbread in a very simple form. 'The absolute dependence of Israel, alike in its tribes and as a whole, and of man as a race, on God, for daily bread, could receive no more fitting acknowledgment; for the bread of the Presence remained before Him perpetually.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* sets the matter in yet another light. 'The shewbread represented the duty of the people, on their part, to set themselves ever before God, and to set the Lord always before their face, and to remember His continual presence, and their own special duty to set themselves anew before Him on each succeeding Sabbath; and they exhibited also God's continual care and favour towards the twelve tribes of His inheritance, which were ever before Him, and His eye ever upon them.'

Bread, being the staff of life, is taken to represent that which it sustains. We speak of their milk as being the life of infants, and so bread is the life of men, and may stand for them representatively. The presentation of these loaves in the presence of God symbolically indicated man's ever-renewed act of giving himself to God. The spiritual meaning of the rite is in some sense preserved in the bread of the Christian Sacrament.

## Magicians, Astrologers, and Sorcerers.

DANIEL ii. 2: 'Then the King commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, for to show the King his dreams.'

**Question.**—*Are not these several names for the same class of persons?*

**Answer.**—The carefulness and precision of Bible narrative is constantly proved afresh as knowledge of Eastern life and custom

increases. Fuller understanding of Babylonish society shows that, in Belshazzar's time, the general name for the class of persons mentioned in the text was *Khakamim*, or 'wise men' (see ver. 12). But these were divided into three classes: 1. *Assaphim*, or theosophists; 2. *Casdim*, or astrologers; and 3. *Gazerim*, or soothsayers. These were separate sections of one guild.

Some accounts make four classes, adding the *Khartummim*, or magicians. The distinct department of study and work for each of these classes can only now be marked out with uncertainty.

The *Khartummim* repulsed 'by their incantations, prayers, and even imprecations, the demons and evil spirits. The form of their conjuration and exorcism may almost be said to have been stereotyped. The existing specimens begin with an enumeration of the evil spirits to be conjured, and their power is qualified and decried. This is followed by the prayer that the person praying or prayed for may be preserved from their evil influences and action; and the whole closes with an invocation, sometimes to a vast number of gods and goddesses, but always to "the spirit of heaven," and the "spirit of earth," to remember the petitioner. They were in the habit of using music in their incantations.'

The *Assaphim* were so called from the breathing or muttering manner in which they are supposed to have spoken. 'In the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and even long before, these "theosophists" were accredited with a spiritual perception of spiritual things, which made them the recognised ministers of the communion between man and the supernatural beings who surrounded him.'

The *Casdim*, as astrologers, 'would be considered the chosen interpreters of the signs, omens, and dreams, by which the gods revealed their will.' Sometimes the term is used generally, and includes the other classes.

The *Gazerim*, or soothsayers, were 'men who divided the heavens into spheres, etc., and divined or determined omens; or to connect the word with the *Kazir* of the Assyrian inscriptions, who collected the laws of astrological phenomena and portents, and pronounced upon them.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* adds: 'These were the classes which presented themselves before Nebuchadnezzar to "show" (interpret) his dream if he would but tell it to them; or drive away by their hymns and exorcisms the evil spirit which "troubled" their royal master. If there is still some indistinctness in allotting to each of these classes its special position in the scientific hierarchy, it is due (1) to the fact that these classes were not exclusive, but frequently

overlapped each other; and (2) to the little help which the versions—notably the Greek versions—give with reference to a system thoroughly strange to the times in which they were compiled. Were it not for cuneiform discovery, the English reader would still be in darkness about the subject.’

### Captive Women to pare their Nails.

DEUTERONOMY xxi. 12: ‘Thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her.’

**Difficulty.**—*What precise act was thus required, and what relation could it bear to the woman's new condition?*

**Explanation.**—The difficulty of this verse is partly occasioned by the uncertainty of the translation. The margin of our Bible gives ‘suffer to grow,’ which is the very opposite of ‘paring.’ The original Hebrew term means ‘to make, or to dress.’ Whatever the woman was to do to her nails, the act must be in harmony with the other acts required of her. Two distinct explanations have been offered, but preference is to be given to the latter of the two. The *Speaker's Commentary* says: ‘We can scarcely doubt that the shaving the head (a customary sign of purification, Lev. xiv. 8.; Num. viii. 7), and the putting away “the garment of her captivity,” must be designed to signify the translation of the woman from the state of a heathen and a slave to that of a wife amongst the covenant people. Consistency seems then to require that she should “pare,” not “suffer to grow,” her nails; and thus, so far as possible, lay aside all belonging to her condition as an alien. This rendering of the word is strongly supported by 2 Sam. xix. 24.’ *Bishop Wordsworth* takes the same view, and says: ‘The ceremonial here prescribed, which was like a purification from Gentilism, would also be a test of the sincerity of the affection of the Israelite for her, as depriving her of some of the *external* ornaments of beauty, especially her hair.’

*Jamieson's* explanation, which is the more probable one, is as follows: ‘According to the war customs of all ancient nations, a female captive became the slave of the victor, who had the sole and unchallengeable control of right to her person. Moses improved this existing usage by special regulations on the subject. He enacted that, in the event of her master being captivated by her beauty, and contemplating a marriage with her, a month should be allowed to elapse, during which her perturbed feelings might be calmed, her mind reconciled to her altered condition, and she might bewail the

loss of her parents, now to her the same as dead. A month was the usual period of mourning with the Jews, and the circumstances mentioned here were the signs of grief—the shaving of the head—the (not “paring”, but, literally, “doing”) allowing the nails to grow uncut, the putting off her gorgeous dress, in which ladies on the eve of being captured arrayed themselves to be the more attractive to their captors. The delay was full of humanity and kindness to the female slave, as well as a prudential measure to try the strength of her master’s affections. If his love should afterwards cool, and he become indifferent to her person, he was not to lord it over her, neither to sell her in the slave-market, nor retain her in a subordinate condition in his house ; but she was free to go where her inclinations led her.’

The passage is a very remarkable instance of Moses’ method of raising, improving, and giving tone to, existing customs. Only when a prevailing custom was morally evil did Moses entirely remove it. Usually he kept the custom, elevating it, and relieving it of any undue pressure it might make on individuals. So here, the Israelites might take to themselves the captive women, as other nations did ; but they must treat them considerately, and nobly, not injuring them by any outbursts of uncontrolled passion.

## Man and Beast in Sackcloth.

JONAH iii. 8: ‘But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God.’

**Question.**—*In what sense could the animals share with man in an act of national repentance ?*

**Answer.**—In Bible history the domesticated animals are always treated as sharing in the joys and sorrows, the rewards and punishments of man. The family and the substance are treated as a whole, and man is affected through his property and possessions. It is only in harmony with this idea that the domestic animals should share in the outward signs and expressions of mourning. The idea is indeed not strange in Western and modern nations, for horses and other animals are gaily caparisoned in times of national triumph and joy, and are dressed with black plumes and velvets in times of funeral. The Psalmist calls upon all animate and inanimate things to join him in praising the Lord ; and it is but the obverse of this that they should join him in the wailings of his seasons of penitence and humiliation. It may be added that the public acts of a *nation* should be acts in which all the nation openly and evidently joins.

*Speaker's Commentary* says : 'In reference to the beasts which are here alluded to, probably those animals only are contemplated which were wont to wear harness, such as horses, asses, mules, camels, and draught oxen. In all ages men have been wont, on occasion, to put upon such animals trappings suited to the particular season, whether in rejoicings, or (as among ourselves) at funerals. Commentators further refer to particular instances in which other shows of mourning have been extended to them. The Persians, when mourning for Masistius, not only cut off their own hair, but that also of their horses and draught beasts, "according to their custom," says the historian ; Alexander the Great ordered the like to be done in honour of Hephæstion ; so did the Thessalians and their allies at the death of Pelopidas. The remarkable peculiarity of the case before us consists in the fact, that the garb of penitence was put upon beasts in order that they might thus help in placating Heaven.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* says : 'The King of Nineveh declared his consciousness of a great truth, that by the Providence of God, the destinies of the animal creation, whether for joy or sorrow, whether for action or suffering, are linked in a mysterious chain of sympathy with those of man.'

*Dean Stanley*, in describing the effects of Jonah's testimony, says : 'The remorse for the wrong and robbery and violence of many generations is awakened. The dumb animals are included, after the fashion of the East, in the universal warning, and the Divine decree is revoked.'

*Kitto* says : 'It seems a remarkable circumstance, that the Ninevites should have extended the acts of fasting and humiliation to their cattle. We find nothing of this among the Hebrews ; but it was a custom among the ancient heathen nations to withhold food from their cattle, as well as from themselves, in times of mourning and humiliation, and in some instances they cut off the hair of their beasts, as well as their own.'

## Wearing of Amulets.

DEUTERONOMY vi. 8, 9 : 'And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.'

**Difficulty.**—*Was not this sanctioning the idolatrous custom of wearing amulets and charms ?*

**Answer.**—In studying the Mosaic social and religious system, it is necessary to bear in mind that it was not absolutely original. It recognised existing habits, sentiments, and ritual practices. It

seldom demanded their entire removal; but, allowing them to continue, it so modified them as to check the evil influences which they might exert, and make them helpful to that which is good.

The Eastern people are gravely superstitious, and the use of charms and amulets is mischievously widespread at the present day. Of this one or two illustrations may be given. *Van Lennep*, who was for years a missionary in Asia Minor, says: 'Orientals believe in charms, spells, and talismans, chiefly consisting of the names of certain saints, or Jins, or of fanciful and senseless formulas, written upon a piece of paper or parchment. This is kept in a case of silver or gold, or more commonly served up in a small cloth bag, an inch long, and hung round the neck, or fastened to the leathern girdle which every Bedawy wears about his waist next to the skin. They have great dread of the "evil-eye." Envy or jealousy are believed to endow a single glance with a deadly venom; and some persons, it is thought, thus inflict injury quite unintentionally. It is certainly a very annoying superstition, to say the least. Upon the walls of a new house must be written, in large characters, in some conspicuous place, the word "Mashallah" (Praise be to God), lest a glance of admiration doom it to the flames, or bring a blight upon its inmates. The dread of the evil-eye exists among all classes and in every religious sect; and though no direct allusion to it occurs in the Scriptures, it cannot be doubted that it generally prevailed among the Hebrews, as well as among their heathen neighbours. Indeed, some of the Mosaic precepts are best explained by supposing that they were chiefly intended to counteract such a superstition.'

Thomson, in his *Land and Book*, says: 'Perhaps the superstition most common at present is that of charms. People of every rank and station in society, and of every creed and sect, employ them for themselves, their children, their houses, their horses, and cattle, and even for their fruit-trees. Amulets and charms are hung round the neck, or hid away in the bosom; they are suspended from the arch of a newly-built house; they dangle from the throat of horses and cattle; and fig and other trees have cabalistic signs drawn upon them, to guard against the evil-eye. The charms most in repute among all sects are brief sentences from their religious books, written with certain formalities, and frequently accompanied with cabalistic diagrams, drawn by those skilled in these magic mysteries. I have examined many of them. They are sewed up in small sacks, generally heart-shaped, and suspended from the tarbush of infants, round the necks of larger children, and about grown-up people according to their particular fancy. Like nostrums in medicine, these amulets are

believed to defend the wearer from sickness and accidents, from the malice of enemies, from balls in a battle, from robbers by the way, from the evil-eye, evil spirits, and, in short, from every species of calamity.'

Compare Lane's *Modern Egypt*, c. 11; and Livingstone's *Travels* p. 285, *et passim*.

In the Mosaic regulations concerning amulets two things seem to have been designed. 1. To place the superstitious sentiment under strict and precise limitations. If certain signs were allowed, it must be understood that no other could be recognised as lawful or useful. 2. To associate the idea of protection from danger directly with Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, and to fix permanently, in the minds of the people, the connection between preservation and obedience to Jehovah's will.

Some think that the injunctions of Moses are to be understood metaphorically; and that he only meant they were to keep the facts of the Passover and Exodus continually in mind; and to have them present *as though* they were inscribed on papyrus or parchment fastened on the wrist, or on the face between the eyes. The modern Jews are therefore regarded as wholly wrong when they allege this precept as a justification for the use of phylacteries. *Bishop Wordsworth* replies to this explanation by saying: 'Doubtless Moses prescribed external memorials; and the opinion which regards this precept as merely figurative seems inadmissible. Indeed, the figurative expressions in Prov. iii. 3; vi. 21; vii. 3, "Bind them (my precepts) round thy neck, on thy heart, on thy hand," presuppose *literal* practices, from which the metaphor was derived.'

The extravagances of later times should not prejudice us against the original Mosaic injunction, so that we fail to discern the practical wisdom of it, as guiding public sentiment, and familiar, but imperiling, practices aright.

It may be added, further, that these requirements of Moses are in perfect harmony with the plan of testing *heart-obedience* by formal commandments in small things, which is the marked characteristic of the earlier forms of Divine training for men.

### Casting a Cord by Lot.

MICAH ii. 5: 'Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the Lord.'

**Question.**—*What ancient custom is referred to in this threatening?*

**Answer.**—The parties addressed in this verse are the 'covetous oppressors,' referred to in verse 2, who 'covet fields, and take them by

violence; and houses, and take them away.' And the idea seems to be, that such persons shall not in any way gain the Divine recognition of their wrong-doing; none by authority of God shall measure out their land for them, or cast lots so as to secure them in their covetous possessions.

The figure in the verse is evidently taken from the original division of the land of Canaan among the tribes and families by lot. The several portions were measured by casting a cord over, or round them, and the measured portions were allocated to families by lot. The expression means this: 'None of you shall have any possession *measured out*.' (See Deut. xxxii, 8, 9.)

The *Revised Version* reads, 'None that shall cast the line by lot.' The generation would be such a godless one, that there would not be one to make reasonable claim to a portion of the Lord's inheritance. By covetousness and violence they had forfeited all right to the 'portion of Jehovah's people.'

## The Rule for the Nazarite's Hair.

NUMBERS vi. 18: 'And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace-offerings.'

**Question.**—*What reason can be given for the importance attached to the Nazarite's hair?*

**Answer.**—Particular sentiments were connected with the hair by Eastern people, and the regulations of the Nazarite vow were made in accordance with those sentiments.

Dressing the hair was a sign of self-respect, and of care for personal appearance. It indicated that a man was fully maintaining family and social relations, and that he was under no physical or religious disability. No man without well-dressed hair would be free to mingle in social intercourse with others. The Egyptians allowed the women to wear their hair long, but kept the heads of men closely shaved from early childhood. The Greeks admired long hair, whether in men or women, as is evident in the representations of their divinities, especially Bacchus and Apollo, whose long locks were a symbol of perpetual youth. The Assyrians also wore it long, the flowing curls being gathered together in a heavy cluster on the back, as represented in the sculptures of Nineveh. But it is particularly to be observed that the Hebrews, while they encouraged the natural growth of hair, observed the natural distinction between the sexes by allowing the

women to wear it long, while the men restrained theirs by frequent clippings to a moderate length. With the Hebrews, wearing the hair long, neglecting the ordinary clippings and dressings, was, as *Lightfoot* tells us, 'a sign of humiliation and self-denial, and of a certain religious slovenliness.' A man under religious vow is supposed to be absorbed in the particular thing to which he is pledged, that he cannot attend even to his own personal appearance. He is separated from common life for the time of his vow, separated to the matter concerning which he has vowed, and the sign, which everybody can recognise, is his unpolled neglected hair.

Cutting or shaving the head is, then, the public act which indicates the closing of the period of the vow, and the resumption of the ordinary social relations, and the hair which had grown during the period of the vow was naturally regarded as sacred, and was solemnly burnt in the sacrificial fire of the peace-offerings.

The *Speaker's Commentary*, in loc., gives several instances of the religious significance associated with the hair in ancient times, and in very diverse countries. 'St. Paul is said to have "shorn" (the word should rather be "polled") his head in Cenchrea because he had a vow' (Acts xviii. 18). The many and various observances connected with the hair may be traced back to the estimation attached to a profuse growth of it. Peleus (*Iliad*, xxiii. 142, sqq.) dedicates a lock of Achilles' hair, and vows to shear it on the safe return of his son from the Trojan war. Achilles, after the death of Patroclus, cuts off this sacred lock, and in course of the funeral rites places it in the hand of his dead friend. Examples are found of vows symbolized by particular modes of cropping, or partially shaving off the hair, as amongst the Egyptians (Herod. ii. 65). The casting of hair from the forehead of victims into the flame as an earnest of the sacrifice about to be offered is mentioned (*Iliad* xix. 254; Virgil, *Æneid* vi. 245). Very apposite to the passage at the head of this paragraph is Koran ii. 192: 'Perform the pilgrimage, and shave not your heads until your offering reaches the place of sacrifice;' and Morier (*Second Journey into Persia*, p. 117): 'After the birth of a son, if the parent be in distress, or the child be sick . . . the mother makes a vow that no razor shall come upon the child's head for a certain time, or for life (cf. 1 Sam. i. 11). If the child recovers, and the vow be but for a time, so that the mother's vow be fulfilled, then she shaves his head at the end of the time prescribed, makes an entertainment, collects money and other things from her relations, which are sent as *Nezers* (offerings) to the mosque.'

## The Agricultural Effects of the Sabbatical Year.

LEVITICUS xxv. 4: 'In the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.'

*Difficulty.*—*Surely the loss of a year's harvesting must have proved seriously disturbing to national life.*

*Explanation.*—Due attention should be paid to the Sabbatical element in the Mosaic system. Its physical, moral, educational, and religious significance deserve careful study, and in this line of study some of the gravest difficulties of the Mosaic system find explanation. The central idea of that system seems to be that everything a Jew had was really God's, and only his upon trust, for God's use and service. The land, the crops, property, family, time, all were God's. But such a truth would need to be constantly held up before the people. It was one that would very readily be dimmed and lost. The Jew was therefore required to show that he held *all* for God by devoting entirely to Him certain *parts*. Thus, that all his time was God's he testified by giving wholly to Him and His worship a seventh part. So here, in relation to the harvests of the soil, he declared that all was God's by giving to God the produce of one year in seven: in that Sabbatical year the Jew took nothing for self uses.

Very remarkable are two things: (1) The entireness of the way in which the idea of 'lying fallow,' on the Sabbatical year, was carried out. It applied to vineyards and fruit-gardens, as well as to the corn-lands. And (2) the liberty given to cattle, wild and tame, to eat freely all the produce that grew of itself during the year.

As modifying the mischievous consequences which we may imagine would result from such an arrangement, it should be remembered (1) that, in the absence of scientific farming, fallows were absolutely necessary if the producing power of the soil was to be conserved. Without some regularly working laws, to which all must conform, the greed of individuals would lead to the exhaustion of Jehovah's land. In the earlier agriculture of England, landowners made conditions with their farm-tenants that a certain number of acres should lie fallow every year. Modern scientific farming, which restores to the soil, in the shape of chemical manures, precisely the elements which the growth of a particular crop has abstracted, has made fallow laws obsolete. (2) It should also be observed that as the Sabbatical year was a regular and well-known national arrangement, all due provision was made for it, and a sufficient proportion

of the six years' harvests was stored up against the emergency. And (3) it is in full harmony with the whole spirit of the Mosaic revelation that there should be such a recurring test of faithfulness to the covenant, by a formal injunction.

*Ewald* explains the appointment of the Sabbatical year in a very interesting way. 'That the soil (especially if, as was the case then, it is not manured) should, for its own sake, lie fallow from time to time, that man had certain duties even towards it, and might not perpetually exact, as it were, work from it, was a feeling which was undoubtedly firmly established long before any conceptions about the Sabbath. But when the idea of the Sabbath was added, not only was a permanent period defined when the soil should rest, but this period was itself sanctified, and its observance placed among the higher duties of man. Here, accordingly, the whole natural view in regard to the soil which prevailed in antiquity found expression in the style peculiar to Jahveism. Even the soil has its divine right to the necessary, and therefore divine, amount of rest and consideration; even towards it man is not to be ceaselessly directing his lust for work and gain; even to it is he to allow a proper time for rest, in order that he may in turn reap the greater blessing. The soil annually produces its fruits as a debt which it owes to man, and on which man may reckon as the reward of the toil which he expends upon it; but just as there are times when the debt may not be demanded even from the human debtor, so is man at the proper time to let the soil alone without exacting payment from it. And as the ancient law everywhere manifests a splendid consistency, it desires that the harvest of every kind, even of orchards and vineyards, shall be renounced, nay, that no purpose shall be entertained of gathering even the spontaneous crops of the year in field and garden.'

*Ewald* shows that due provision was made, during this year, for the needy, as they were at liberty to gather the fruits of every kind which would grow freely and abundantly on the fallows. Also we need not suppose that the Sabbatical was an idle year. Other occupations besides ploughing, sowing, and reaping were permitted; and, in that year, special attention was given to moral and religious instruction.

Dr. Ginsburg, *Commentary for English Readers*, in loc., says: 'What constitutes cultivation, and how much of labour was regarded as transgressing this law, may be seen from the following canons which obtained during the second Temple. No one was allowed to plant trees in the Sabbatical year, nor to cut off dried-up branches, to break off withered leaves, to smoke under the plants in

order to kill the insects, nor to besmear the unripe fruit with any kind of soil in order to protect them, etc. Anyone who committed one of these things received the prescribed number of stripes. As much land, however, might be cultivated as was required for the payment of taxes, as well as for growing the barley required for the omer, or wave-sheaf at the Passover, and wheat for the two wave-loaves at Pentecost."

## The Unalterable Law of the Medes and Persians.

DANIEL vi. 8: 'Now, O King, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.'

**Difficulty.**—*How did Medo-Persian law differ from ordinary law?*

**Explanation.**—It was regarded as promulgated by the king as a *deified* person. This conception of royalty is peculiar to the East, though we have a Western shadow of it in the doctrine, once taught even in England, of the Divine right of kings. The extravagant extent of the sentiment in Oriental nations may be illustrated. 'Babylonian kings, from the remote days of Khammurabi to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, called themselves divine and god-born. In an inscription (stated to be as early as 2,000 B.C.) in the palace of Assurbanipal at Kouyunjik the king counts as his ancestor one Sugamunu; and this ancestor was afterwards worshipped by the Babylonians as a god. Amaragu is the name of another king similarly deified. Izdubar, the hero of the 'deluge' tablets, and identified by some with the Biblical Nimrod, received like honours, and a tablet with a prayer addressed to him has been discovered at Nineveh. Hero-worship and king-worship made no strange demands upon the most idolatrous of nations; and therefore the Babylonians, when called upon to pay to the conqueror—Darius the Mede—the homage due to a god, readily acceded to the demand.' (*Speaker's Commentary.*)

*Chardin* says that, in Persia, when the king has condemned a person, it is no longer lawful to mention his name, or to intercede in his favour. Though the king were drunk or beside himself, yet the decree must be executed; otherwise he would contradict himself, and the law admits of no contradiction.

An incarnation of God could not afford to appear mistaken, or changeable; and this idea is evidently the basis of the notion that his laws were unalterable. What was regarded as a direct intervention of the gods alone could form sufficient reason for a change.

## The Writing on the Stones at Ebal.

DEUTERONOMY xxvii. 2, 3: 'And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister: and thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' (See Joshua viii. 30-35.)

**Difficulties.**—1. *How could all Israel get to Ebal on the day of crossing the Jordan?* 2. *Why was Ebal selected as the place for the renewal of the covenant?* 3. *What hope was there that writing on plaister would endure?* 4. *How could 'all the words of the law' be written on two stones?*

**Explanations.**—The figurative character of Eastern language must be constantly borne in mind by the Scripture reader. 'On the day' is a figure of speech, meaning 'at the time'; 'as soon as convenient.' A journey to Ebal on the day of the crossing was physically impossible by reason of the distance, and the presence of Canaanite fortresses and armies blocking the way. As soon as Jericho was overthrown, and Ai destroyed, the inhabitants of Central Palestine fled from their homes, and then, at the first possible moment, before either the southern or the northern nations could combine for a last struggle, Joshua rapidly marched the people to Ebal, and fulfilled the Mosaic instructions. Such a march may seem strange and almost impossible to us, but great tribes, familiar with desert movements, would quickly and readily accomplish it, and return to their old camping-ground.

Ebal was selected as a central situation, from which Joshua seemed to embrace the whole country given by God to Israel. We may also notice that the conformation of the valley, and proximity of the hill-sides, fitted it for such a national gathering, and enabled all present to take intelligent part in what was done. For description of the district, see Dr. Geikie's *Hours with the Bible*, vol. ii., p. 410.

The rough surface of the stones would unfit them for writing or painting, and we are not to understand that the laws were engraved or carved into the stone. A hard white cement, covering the surface of the stone, would be as firm and durable as the stone, and in that dry climate the writing or painting would be clear and distinct for generations. The practice was common in Egypt; and many ancient pictures painted on such layers of gypsum are still visible, as well as ancient writings in reddish ink. Thomson (*Land and Book*, p. 471) says: 'I have seen numerous specimens of this kind of writing, certainly more than 2,000 years old, and still as distinct as when it was

first inscribed on the plaster.' At Pompeii ancient writings are still preserved on the cement which covers the walls of the houses and streets.

As the exhibition of laws in this manner on stones, pillars, or tablets, was familiar to the ancients, and they were skilful in compressing a great deal upon a small surface, as is shown by the elaborate inscriptions on recently recovered monuments, there is really no difficulty in assuming that these stones were prepared beforehand, and contained a full summary of the covenant requirements of God. It need not have been the Book of Deuteronomy, the Decalogue only, or the mere table of blessings and cursings. 'The words employed can only mean all the laws revealed from God to the people by Moses' (exclusive of the purely Mosaic elaborations, details, and repetitions). 'In these would not be included the historical, didactic, ethnological, and other non-legislative matter comprised in the Pentateuch, but simply its legal enactments, regarded by the Jews as 613 in number.' (*Speaker's Commentary*, in loc.)

The stones were to serve as a monument testifying to the fact that, then and there, the whole people of Israel took possession of the land *on the Divine conditions*, so only their side of the covenant, the essential principles of moral and religious conduct to which they stood pledged, required to be written on the memorial. The altar, beside the stones, seemed to assure God's faithful keeping of His side of the covenant if, in all obedience and holiness, they were faithful to theirs.

### Egyptian Divining-Cups.

GENESIS xliv. 2, 5: 'Put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest.' 'Is not this in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth?' (See also ver. 15.)

**Difficulty.**—*Did Joseph so far give up his religion as to adopt Egyptian magical customs?*

**Answer.**—It may be well first to explain what these 'divining-cups' were. E. L. Clark, in *Israel in Egypt*, p. 166, says: 'The priests are believed to possess the art of knowing the will of the gods from the divining-cups. Joseph brought fear into the hearts of his brethren by referring to this well-known Egyptian custom. Such bowls, or cups, are of finest workmanship, and represent at least the wisdom of the workman who made them. They have the holy beetle carrying a ball like the sun in his claws, his wings outstretched, standing upon a lotus-flower. A similar beetle, with wider wings, forms a canopy, the ends of which rest on lotus-plants. Beneath this are the sphinxes, in the unusual position of action, standing erect, one

foot lifted above images, and the wings elevated. Many mysterious lines and forms occupy the centre and the rim. The shadows which come and go within these wine-cups, and the position of certain drops of water or wine, are thought to be not less certain indications of the Divine will than the eclipse of the sun, or the discovery of new stars.'

The sacred cup was a symbol of the Nile. *Lane* says that divination by cups was practised either by dropping gold, silver, or jewels, into the water, and then examining their appearance; or simply by looking into the water as into a mirror, somewhat probably as the famous Egyptian magician did into the mirror of ink, as mentioned by the Duke of Northumberland and others in the present day.

Joseph was at this time acting a part before his brothers, with a definite object in view; and we may easily explain all that was said and done as being necessary to the consistent and complete carrying out of the part. So far from assuming that Joseph had, in any sense, given up his religion, we need not even suppose that he actually had a divining-cup. It is quite enough that, for his immediate purpose, he had his silver drinking-cup so called. It was part of his plan to produce a profound impression of his dignity and power as an Egyptian official upon his brethren, and so to disarm any suspicions that they might entertain. Joseph was to these Hebrews the great Egyptian official, and he did just what such an officer would do, and said just what such an officer would say. We can learn nothing from such an incident concerning the ordinary habits of Joseph, and the faithfulness which distinguished him is a strong presumption against the notion that he either *divined*, or *made trial* in any of the idolatrous ways. 'If he had resorted to divination by cups, he would have been untrue to his sacred character as a worshipper and prophet of the one God, and would have degraded himself to the level of the Egyptian magicians, and would have given countenance to their superstitions.' (*Bishop Wordsworth.*)

The morality of thus 'acting a part' may best be tested by familiar incidents in modern life, and the sentiments commonly cherished concerning them. For instance, the son who has long been away in foreign lands, comes to his old home unexpectedly, and acts the part of a stranger, talking to the aged parents about their lost son to find out if he has the old place in their hearts. No one imagines for one moment that this is immoral, deceptive, or mischievous. So the policeman puts on disguise, and acts a part, in order to secure the apprehension of a criminal, and such stratagem is applauded. We must not 'do evil that good may come'; but devices, disguises, stratagems, and part-acting, need not be evil, and so may not only be

permissible, but even wise and right, the best thing under the circumstances. A little consideration will reveal that Joseph could not have met the state of things more skilfully or more prudently than he did. There need be no question about the rightness of his 'acting a part'; the only question that seems difficult to answer is this: Did he not *overdo* his part?

### The Law against Minglings.

LEVITICUS xix. 19: 'Thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed, neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.'

**Question.**—*Is there a permanence of obligation attaching to this law?*

**Answer.**—Such an obligation has never been recognised. Within limitations different breeds of animals have been crossed, and the breeds improved thereby. And mixed stuffs are familiar articles of merchandise. The farmers, if they do not absolutely sow two kinds of seeds together, scatter the clover before the wheat is up.

The law belongs to the period when God was pleased to teach His people by precise and formal rules; and when it was especially needful to impress that man must in no way interfere with the Divine order and arrangement, either in nature or in revelation. Outside of the formal theocracy, and after it has done its work, and made its witness, the free dominion and use of the earth is given to men. They soon discover that they cannot improve on, or alter, the actual Divine order, but they can, and they may, develop the possibilities that are in the Divine Creation. As an illustration we may remind of the improvements of plants by artificial fertilization. And it is curious to note that while, in the earlier times, the Hebrews were forbidden to breed mules, these animals became the peculiar treasure of kings and princes in the period of the monarchy.

From the Mosaic point of view, no doubt this law against minglings was an important agency in preserving the separateness, simplicity, and isolation of the Hebrews as a nation. It was one of the outward teachings of the *selectness* of the nation.

### Modes of calling Tribes together.

1 SAMUEL xi. 7: 'And he took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Was this an invention of Saul's, or was it done in accordance with a recognised tribal custom?*

**Answer.**—The gathering together of scattered portions of a tribe, or family of tribes, to meet some pressing necessity, was so im-

portant a matter, and so frequently required, that we may be quite sure some customs in relation to it were established. Perhaps usually a messenger, or a trumpet call, sufficed. In our own land, at one time, beacon fires were lighted on the hill-tops. There is, however, a previous case narrated in Scripture which is very similar to Saul's; and both indicate action taken suddenly, and under the influence of passion. We may therefore assume that such a custom was only followed in a case of extreme urgency.

The earlier case is of so painful a character that we do not give the details, but refer our readers to Judges xix., especially verses 29, 30. 'The narrative takes us back to wild times, when the passions of men expressed themselves in wild and fierce expedients.' Dean Stanley tells us in a footnote to *Jewish Church*, vol i., p. 261: 'A similar incident is said to have occurred recently in the tribes near Damascus. An Arab woman having been accused of unchastity by another, was killed by her father, who then tore her body open in the presence of the tribe, and found that she was innocent. The slanderer was then judged. Her tongue was cut out, and she was hewn into small pieces, which were sent all over the desert.'

*Lucian* tells of the practice by the Scythians, of a custom, like Saul's, of sending round the pieces of an ox, as a threatening to all who fail to respond to the summons.

Readers of 'Lady of the Lake' will remember the very striking description of calling a Highland clan together for an expedition or a defence. *Sir Walter Scott* explains his allusion thus: 'When a Highland chief wished to summon his clan, he slew a goat, and making a cross of any light wood, seared its extremities at the fire, and extinguished them in the blood of the animal. It was delivered to a swift and trusty messenger, who ran with it to the next hamlet, where he presented it to the principal person with a single word, implying the place of rendezvous. He who received the symbol was bound to send it forward with equal despatch to the next village, and thus it passed with incredible celerity through all the district which owed allegiance to the chief. At sight of the fiery cross every man, from sixteen years old to sixty, capable of bearing arms, was obliged instantly to repair to the place of rendezvous. He who failed to appear suffered the extremities of fire and sword; emblematically denounced by the bloody and burnt marks upon the warlike signal.'

Describing the effect of the message from Jabesh Gilead upon Saul, *Kitto* says: 'The news awoke all the patriot and the king within him. Like Samson aroused from slumber, he "shook his invincible locks," and stood up in the fulness of his strength. The

time was come to *use*, in behalf of the people, the office to which he had been chosen, and to make that office a truth in their eyes and in the eyes of their enemies. He did not hesitate one moment to call the people to arms, and that not with uncertain voice, but commandingly as their king, whose summons it was their duty to obey. The new monarch had an opportunity for affording such signal proof of his capacity, decision, and military conduct, as might win for him the general admiration of his subjects, and secure his full possession of the royal power to which he had been appointed.'

## Polygamy within the Mosaic System.

1 SAMUEL i. 2 : 'And he had two wives ; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah ; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.'

**Difficulty.**—*In view of the original law for humanity—one husband and one wife—could polygamy ever be considered right ?*

**Explanation.**—We may deal first with the case of Elkanah, and then treat of the general question. Monogamy was certainly the Divinely appointed rule, but circumstances might arise in which a modification of the rule seemed advisable. The land of Canaan had been allotted to families, and it was regarded as supremely important that in no case should the land be alienated from the family. But the keeping of the property depended on a man's having a son born to him as his heir. If a man married, and his wife bare no children, he was placed in a most anxious position, and relief was found for him in permission to take a second wife. Suggestions of such a custom we find in Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham, and in the operation of the Levirate law. The family of Zelophehad was placed in great difficulty because the children were all daughters, and a special law had to be passed for their relief, permitting them to inherit. Hannah was the first wife of Elkanah, and only when it was made plain that she was to have no children did he take the second wife, who evidently occupied, throughout the references to her, quite a secondary and subordinate position, and is a kind of Hagar in relation to Sarah. We look on the case of Elkanah as one of the exceptions that prove the monogamic rule to have prevailed.

On the general question *Dr. C. Geikie* writes, tracing the introduction of polygamy to Lamech : 'A new floodgate of evil is now opened, for with Lamech begins polygamy. One wife had been created for Adam, and, hitherto, had been the rule ; but the "wild man" takes two, and thus introduces a usage which, more than any other, corrupts society, where it prevails. That it should have been

thus ascribed to the race of Cain is significant ; for though it afterwards existed in Israel, it was always the exception. The law permitted, but did not favour it ; and even kings were forbidden to have many wives.'

The Mosaic law aimed at mitigating rather than removing evils which were inseparable from the state of society in that day. Its enactments were directed (1) to the discouragement of polygamy ; (2) to obviate the injustice frequently consequent upon the exercise of the rights of a father or a master ; (3) to bring divorce under some restriction ; and (4) to enforce purity of life during the maintenance of the matrimonial bond.

*Kitto* says : ' Although a plurality of wives was not forbidden by the law of Moses, the possession of more than one was exceedingly rare, except among chiefs and princes, as is still the case in those Eastern countries where the same permission exists. The popular feeling, even in the presence of such a permissive law, is, and we have reason to suppose was, averse to the exercise of this privilege, except in particular cases. This is evinced by the notion of some old Jewish commentators on the case before us, that one of this man's wives was childless, as a punishment upon him for having taken more than one. This shows the tendency of Jewish opinion ; and among the Jews at this day polygamy is scarcely ever practised, even in those Eastern countries where the public law offers no restriction. As to the modern Orientals, the country in which polygamy most prevails is Persia ; but even there it is not common to find a man who has more than one wife.'

Subsequent to the Captivity we find the monogamic system fully established. *Gadsby* says that Mahomet allowed his male followers each to have *four* wives, if he could maintain them. There are few, however, in Egypt, who have so many ; indeed, most have only one wife. Bachelors, or persons suspected of being bachelors, are looked upon with contempt or distrust.'

*Miss Martineau* says : ' If we are to look for a hell upon earth, it is where polygamy exists ; and, as polygamy runs riot in Egypt, Egypt is the lowest depth of this hell.'

### Extraordinary Use of Hallowed Bread.

1 SAMUEL xxi. 6 : ' So the priests gave him holy bread ; for there was no bread there but the shew-bread, that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.'

**Question.**—*Was the priest justified in this use of the shew-bread ?*

**Answer.**—In referring to this incident as illustrating the reasonable modifications of the Sabbath-law, our Lord laid down the principle

that human necessities must override all formal and ritual rules. From this point of view it was quite right for David, in his extremity, to have the loaves of the shew-bread. But the priest did not distinctly take this position. He was deceived into the idea that the King, who had supreme authority, requisitioned these loaves. The priest's excuse for his giving the loaves was reasonable. David's plea of necessity was reasonable. All that is to be regretted in the transaction is the deception to which David was driven by the pressure of circumstances.

'The loneliness of David, and the fact that he had no weapons, created suspicion ; but with the craftiness and skill at framing excuses and explanations, which, from the higher standards of Christianity, we call untruthfulness, but which was always a characteristic of the Jewish race, and seems to have been a special hereditary quality in the family of David, he disarmed the suspicions, and induced the priest to give him loaves of the old shew-bread, and the sword of Goliath.'

*Kitto* supports the explanation given above, that the priest understood a special claim was made *for the King's service*. David 'prepared an ingenious tale to delude the pontiff. He told him that he was upon most urgent and private business for the King, citing the very words which, as he said, Saul had used in intrusting this secret mission to him ; and his servants, he alleged, had been directed to meet him at a certain place. This, of course, left the high priest to understand that whatever aid was rendered to him, would be advancing the King's service.'

*Canon Spence* says : 'This "hallowed bread," or shew-bread, five loaves of which David petitioned for, consisted of twelve loaves, one for each tribe, which were placed in the tabernacle fresh every Sabbath-day. The law of Moses was that this bread, being most holy, could only be eaten by the priests in the holy place. It is probable that this regulation had been relaxed, and that the bread was now often being carried away and eaten in the homes of the ministering priests ; and on urgent occasions, perhaps, was even given to the "laity," as in this case, the proviso only being made that the consumers of the bread should be ceremonially pure. Our Saviour, in Matt. xii. 3, especially uses this example, drawn from the Tabernacle's honoured customs, to justify a violation of the letter of the law, when its strict observance would stand in the way of the fulfilment of man's sacred duty to his neighbour. The natural inference from this incident would be that such a violation of the Mosaic law was not an uncommon occurrence. The Talmud, however, is most anxious that

this inference should not be drawn, and points out in the treatise *Menachoth* (Meat Offerings) that this bread was not newly taken out of the sanctuary, but had been removed on some previous day, and that as, after a week's exposure, it was stale and dry, the priests ate but little of it, and the rest was left. It also points out that had such violation of the Levitical law been common, so much importance would not have been attached to this incident.'

## What were the Idol Groves?

EXODUS xxxiv. 13: 'But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves.'

**Question.**—*Were these groves of trees, or some kind of image of the female divinity known as Astarte?*

**Answer.**—Groves were important associations of pagan worship in classical times, and 'the connection of sacred groves and trees with the worship of the powers of nature, may be traced very generally amongst the ancient nations of Europe and Asia.'

The word translated 'groves' is '*ashērāh*,' and it is quite a different word from that translated 'grove' in Gen. xxi. 33 (*eshel*). *Ashērāh* denotes something that is upright, fixed, or planted, in the ground. It would seem to suggest a pillar, or a monument, if it is to be distinguished from an image or statue. The suggestion has been made, and it seems to be a reasonable one, that the *ashērāh* was a pillar, usually of wood, which was recognised as a symbol of Astarte. Very possibly it was like the sacred tree of the Assyrians, which, from the sculptured figures, was an upright stock, which was adorned at festive seasons with boughs, flowers, and ribbons.

*Professor Wilkins* says that the word translated 'grove' properly denotes a symbolical pole or stem of a tree. '*Movers* indeed maintains that Asherah is a goddess, distinct from Ashtoreth, but it seems from the usage of the word far more probable that the word denotes merely the upright wooden symbol, employed in the worship of Ashtoreth, sometimes of comparatively small size and moveable, as in the case of the Asherah which Josiah found standing on the altar of Baal Peor, in the temple of the Lord, and brought out to be destroyed, when he banished the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth from Jerusalem, sometimes fixed up in numbers round the altars of Baal, as in the "grove" which Gideon cut down in the night at Ophrah.'

## Ruth's Mode of claiming the Kinsmanship of Boaz.

RUTH iii. 9: 'And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid; spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.'

**Question.**—*Is it possible to reconcile this conduct of Ruth's with the modesty becoming to a young woman?*

**Answer.**—It would be altogether unfair to judge this incident in the light of modern and Western sentiments and customs. We cannot even understand it unless we carefully consider the notions of that age. It is necessary also to bear in mind that Ruth did not thus act of her own accord, but in strict obedience to the instructions of Naomi, who could be fully trusted to know well the customs of the country, and to take all care of the honour of her daughter-in-law.

The *Speaker's Commentary* points out that the difficulty in the way of Naomi's getting her rights was the question of the marriage of Ruth. Naomi saw her opportunity in the interest Boaz had taken in Ruth, and the attentions he had shown her. Now the best thing was for Ruth to claim the protection of Boaz, and then, for the sake of securing her as his wife, Boaz would be sure to get over the difficulty of the other kinsman standing in the way. Naomi's scheme, therefore, precisely meant that Ruth should make her marriage-claim of Boaz, and she planned the best possible occasion and method for making this claim.

We may first see the relation of this 'spreading the skirt over' in connection with marriage. *Dr. A. Clarke* says: 'Even to this day, when a Jew marries a woman, he throws the skirt, or end of his tallith over her, to signify that he has taken her under his protection.' From a passage in the Koran it is implied that prior to the time of Mohammed, the next of kin could, by thus throwing his garment over the widow, assert his claim to her person and dower, often with great injustice. *Roberts* gives the fullest illustration we have met with, from Hindoo marriage customs: 'The bride is seated on a throne, surrounded by matrons, having on her veil, her gayest robes, and most valuable jewels. After the thāli has been tied round her neck, the bridegroom approaches her with a silken skirt (purchased by himself), and folds it round her several times over the rest of her clothes. A common way of saying he has married her is "he has given her the *Koori*," has spread the skirt over her. There are, however, those who throw a long robe over the shoulders of the bride, instead of putting on the skirt. An angry husband sometimes says to his wife, "Give me back my skirt," meaning he wishes to have the

marriage compact dissolved. The request of Ruth, therefore, amounted to nothing more than that Boaz should marry her.'

Had Boaz resolved to marry her, he would have done just this very thing. Now Ruth had legal claims of marriage on her kinsman, and she supposed this kinsman to be Boaz, so she was absolutely within her right in asking for the marriage symbol.

In explanation of the incident we may further note that, in harvest-time, the reapers and their master sleep on the threshing-floors, that Orientals do not remove their dress for sleeping, but they are very particular about folding their robe round their feet. All Ruth was to do was to lift the end of the robe from the feet of Boaz, and lay it on herself; when the movement awoke Boaz, she was to ask him to do voluntarily the symbolical act which she had begun.

*Kitto* makes a good suggestion. 'It is not unlikely' that, when this matter had been first suggested by Naomi, Ruth, as a stranger, had shrunk from making this claim publicly in the harvest-field, and that Naomi had, therefore, to spare her in that respect, devised this mode of enabling her to do so in private, in which she would find less difficulty, seeing that Boaz had already won her confidence by his fatherly consideration for her. It may be that the desire to evade one difficulty somewhat blinded this good woman to the danger that may have lurked in the other alternative.'

### The Affliction of Emerods.

**I SAMUEL v. 6:** 'But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and He destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof' (*Rev. Ver.* 'tumours').

**Question.**—*Is it possible for us to discover the probable character of this affliction?*

**Answer.**—Medical science was in such an undeveloped state, that the features of disease noticed in Scriptures are seldom those which sharply distinguish one disease from another. We should not expect to find in Scripture-writers the precise skill of the cultured and experienced physician. In this case we have indication of tumourous swellings, but it is with great uncertainty that we identify the swellings with what we know as hæmorrhoids, or bleeding piles, a distressing and painful, but not a fatal form of disease. Beyond the argument based on the name, the only Bible evidence that can be adduced, is a sentence in Psalm lxxviii. 66, in which, referring to these events, the Psalmist says, 'And He smote His enemies in the hinder parts.' But the *Revised Version* corrects the expression, which should be, 'And He smote His enemies backward.' We can only say

that some plague, recognised as a Divine visitation, and known by the name of emerods, was familiar to the Eastern people in ancient times; for it is included among the Divine judgments in Deut. xxviii. 27, and is there classed with diseases of the skin and swellings of the flesh.

*Dr. Edersheim* thinks it was a malignant skin disease, highly infectious and fatal in its character. 'Judging from the derivation of the word, and from its employment in connection with other skin diseases, we regard it as a kind of pestilential boils of a very malignant character.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* takes the same view. 'It is more likely to have been a pestilence accompanied by local swellings, such as mark the Oriental plague, and may have been caused by the devastations of the field vermin, which, *Oken* assures us, often cause famine by their ravages.'

*Smith's Bible Dictionary* argues for the modern idea of hæmorrhoids, on the ground partly of the root-meaning of the word used, and partly in view of the fact that these are very common in Syria at present, Oriental habits of want of exercise and improper food, producing derangement of the liver and constipation, etc., inducing their development. The words of 1 Sam. v. 12, 'The men that died not were smitten with emerods,' show that the disease was not necessarily fatal.

*Dr. S. Cox*, in the *Expositor* strongly commends this view.

*Ewald* thinks the disease was either a bloody flux, which in certain countries accompanies other contagious diseases, or tumours affecting the same part of the body. He observes, by way of illustration, that *Leipsic* suffered in February and March, 1855, from an epidemic of boils.

*Jamieson* takes the disease to have been an aggravated form of hæmorrhoids, and adds: 'As the heathens generally regarded diseases affecting the secret parts of the body as punishments from the gods for trespasses committed against themselves, the *Ashdodites* would be the more ready to look upon the prevailing epidemic as demonstrating the anger of God, already shown against their idol.'

### Michal's Image.

1 SAMUEL xix. 13: 'And Michal took the teraphim, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair at the head thereof, and covered it with the clothes.'

**Question.**—What was the 'image' which Michal was enabled to use in this singular way; and what had the pillow of goat's hair to do with it?

**Answer.**—We can readily understand Michal's quick-witted device to gain time for David to escape. The front of the house was

watched by the officers of Saul, and at any moment they might make forcible entry. Michal was prompt and skilful. She let David down through a window at the back of the house, and then devised the appearance of a sick man, lying on his bed, and quite unable to obey any commands of the king. We have some explanations of the way in which she managed this appearance of a sick man. We must not think of our raised beds: the Eastern beds were only mats laid on the higher part of the floor against the wall: there it would be shady and dark, and the deception would be easily successful. The appearance of a man asleep in sickness, covered warmly with clothes, and possibly having his head and face protected by a sort of mosquito-net, was promptly arranged.

The materials seem to have been ready to Michal's hand, but it certainly creates surprise to find in the house of an Israelite, whose law strictly forbade images, anything taking at all the form of a human being. The *Revised Version* tells us that Michal took the *teraphim*, and from this it is argued that the women may have kept, in their private apartments, figures, like those which Rachel had, when she left Padan-aram, and which were regarded as securing prosperity and good luck to the house.

But surely we have very small ground for making an idolatrous teraphim out of Michal's image. It is true that Rachel had stolen and concealed such figures, but from her mode of concealing them it is quite clear that they must have been very small, probably little metal figures, like the little gods of heathen lands, and not larger than ordinary dolls. Such an image could not possibly have answered Michal's purpose, or deceived anybody into the idea that a man lay on the bed. Then, we have no other indication that the Israelites were addicted to the superstitious use of these household gods, or teraphim, than is to be found in the fact that Rachel had them, and Josiah destroyed them, when he rooted out the elaborate idolatry of the later monarchy.

Examining the narrative carefully, it becomes evident that Michal was specially anxious about the appearance of the head, for the very reason that what she put into the bed had not the shape and form of a man's head. We are carefully informed that the mat, or pillow of goat's hair was disposed about his head, so as to give the appearance of a man's hair. All that was necessary was to find some pillar, or block, or piece of household furniture, which would raise the clothes, dispose the goat's hair round the part that was on the pillow, bring the clothes high up, and cast a light mosquito-net over the upper part. As she was a princess, we may be sure that the

officers would take her word, after only a distant and cursory examination, and would discover the deception only when Saul commanded them to fetch David, whether he were sick or well.

We may confirm this view by giving some account of the ancient teraphim, and by showing the unsatisfactory character of the explanations usually given of the goat's hair pillow.

*Ewald* tells us that an image of this sort did not consist of a single object, but of several distinct parts, at any rate when the owner cared to have one of the more fully adorned and perfect specimens. The essential kernel of it, made either out of stone or wood, always attempted to exhibit the image of a god in human form, even life-size; but already in the earliest times this by itself was readily regarded as too plain. It generally received, therefore, a coating of gold or silver, either over the whole body or only particular portions. 'These domestic deities were employed from the earliest times to furnish oracles, so that the word *teraphim* is absolutely identical with oracular divinity. For this purpose the first addition to the image was an *ephod*, or magnificent robe put over the shoulders, having on its breast a casket containing the lots employed in determining the oracle. In the second place a kind of mask was placed over the head of the image, in which the priest who was seeking the oracle probably had to perceive by sundry tokens whether the god was willing or not to give an oracle at all at that particular time. These masks alone made the image properly complete, and from them the divinities received the name of *teraphim*, meaning, a nodding countenance, or living mask.' They were undoubtedly connected with idolatrous systems, but there is certainly no sufficient proof that they were found in the houses of pious Jehovah worshippers. *Kitto* tries to support the idea that Michal had this figure in the women's apartments, where she could keep it out of David's sight: but if it was life-size that would surely be impossible.

It is evident that many articles of household furniture could be readily made to serve Michal's purpose; and all would depend on her skill in making the appearance of a man's head on the pillow. *Josephus* has a foolish explanation. He says that Michal put in the bed the lungs of a goat recently killed, the palpitations of which would impart the motion caused by a man's breathing in bed. Some suggest that the head was covered with a mosquito-net made of goat's hair. Others say there was a goat's-hair pillow below the head and a cloth over it. The hair of a Syrian goat might form a good stuffing for a pillow-case, but such a stuffing would in no way help the deception.

*Kitto* makes a suggestion, that the pillow was of goat's skin, with the hair outside ; and that such a pillow was then regarded as having a sanative property in some diseases ; whence to see such a pillow in a bed would strengthen the illusion that a sick man lay there.

We much prefer what seems a simple and satisfactory explanation, that Michal disposed the goat's hair in such a way as to produce a passable resemblance to David's head.

## Women's Adornments.

ISAIAH iii. 18-24 : 'In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon.'

**Question.**—*Can these various articles of female attire be reasonably identified ?*

**Answer.**—Not with any great certainty. Fashions are constantly changing, and the names for fashionable articles are variable ; but collecting the various suggestions of travellers and expositors, a very fair account of them may be given.

Illustrating the 'round tires,' one writer says : 'The women of Samaria wear now a head-dress which perfectly illustrates the prophet's description. It is a sort of bonnet with a horse-shoe shape in front, and in the front are some silver coins lapping over one another, and making a crescent-shaped tire (resembling the crescent moon) round the forehead and down to the ears.

*Delitzsch* gives the following careful details and paraphrase : "On that day the Lord will put away the show of the ankle-clasps and of the head-bands, and of the crescents ; the ear-rings and the arm-chains, and the light veils ; the diadems and the stepping chains, and the girdles and the smelling-bottles, and the amulets ; the finger-rings and the nose-rings ; the gala-dresses and the sleeve-frocks, and the wrappers and the pockets ; the hand-mirrors and the Sindu cloths, and the turbans and the gauze mantles." "Ankle-clasps : " rings of gold, silver, or ivory, worn round the ankle. "Head-bands" or frontlets : plaited bands of gold or silver thread, worn below the hair-net, and reaching from one ear to the other ; or were sun-like balls, which were worn as ornaments round the neck. "Crescents : " little pendants of this kind fastened round the neck, and hanging down upon the breast. (In Judges viii. 21, we meet with them as ornaments hung round the camels' necks.) Such ornaments are still worn by Arabian girls, who generally have several different kinds of them. "Ear-rings : " we meet with these in Judges viii. 26, as an ornament worn by Midianitish kings. "Arm-chains : " according to

the Targum, these were chains worn upon the arm, or spangles upon the wrists, answering to the spangles upon the ankles. "Fluttering veils:" these were more expensive than the ordinary veils worn by girls. "Diadems" are only mentioned in other parts of Scripture as being worn by men (*e.g.*, by priests, bridegrooms, or persons of high rank). "Stepping-chains:" the chain worn to shorten and give elegance to the step. "Girdles:" dress-girdles, such as were worn by brides upon their wedding-day (*cf.* Jer. ii. 32 with Isaiah xlix. 18); the word is erroneously rendered "hair-pins" in the Targum. "Smelling-bottles:" the breath of an aroma. "Amulets:" gems or metal plates with an inscription upon them, which were worn as a protection as well as an ornament. "Finger-rings:" or signet-rings worn upon the finger. "Nose-rings" were fastened in the central division of the nose, and hung down over the mouth; they have been ornaments in common use in the East from the time of the patriarchs down to the present day (Gen. xxiv. 22). "Gala-dresses" are dresses not usually worn, but taken off when at home. "Sleeve-frocks:" the second tunic, worn above the ordinary one—the Roman *stola*. "Wrappers:" broad cloths wrapped round the body. "Pockets" were for holding money (2 Kings v. 23), which was generally carried by men in the girdle or in a purse. "Hand-mirrors:" the Septuagint renders this Lacedæmonian gauze, or transparent dresses, which showed the nakedness rather than concealed it; but the better rendering is, mirrors with handles; polished metal plates. "Sindu-cloths" (*sedinim*): veils or coverings of the finest linen, viz., of Sindu or Hindu cloth—Sindu, the land of Indus, being the earlier name for India. "Turbans:" the head-dress composed of twisted cloths of different colours. "Gauze mantles:" delicate veil-like mantles thrown over the rest of the clothes. Stockings and handkerchiefs are not mentioned; the former were first introduced into Hither Asia from Media long after Isaiah's time; and a Jerusalem lady no more thought of using the latter than a Grecian or Roman lady did.'

### The Ancient Law of the Goël.

RUTH iv. 5: 'Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.'

**Question.**—*Did not Boaz, on this occasion, make a demand which was an exaggeration of the acknowledged custom; and would not the kinsman have been justified in resisting him?*

**Answer.**—The only thing that might seem to bar Ruth's right to marriage with the family *goël* is her foreign birth; but, in a previous

paragraph, we have shown that the law against foreign marriages applied only to the Canaanite nations, so that a Moabite wife could claim her legal rights in Israel.

The duties of the *goël*, or family representative, need, however, some careful attention. We are familiar with his duty as 'avenger of blood,' but his relations to a branch of the family which may have lost its head, and be left without any heir to take his place, are not so well understood. They strike us as almost repulsive, but were necessary at a time when property was not permitted to change hands, or to be alienated from the family to which it was originally given. The old Jewish marriage customs required the nearest relation of a dead husband to become his *goël*, or redeemer, buying back his inheritance, if estranged, and marrying his widow, if childless; to raise up a son to him, that 'his name should not cease in Israel.' All male blood relations of the deceased man were reckoned as among his *goelim*, or redeemers; but the nearest of all was the *goël*, and was the first who was bound to redeem his kinsman's name and inheritance. If, however, he refused to redeem, then the next kinsman succeeded to his right and duty; but he himself, for his refusal, was put to an open shame.

*Dr. S. Cox* thinks that the Moabitish origin of Ruth formed the real excuse of the *goel* in this case. His view is so interesting that it may be given in full. 'We need not think over-hardly, therefore, even of this anonymous kinsman. He may have been, probably he was, a just man according to his rights. Walking by the strict requirements of the law of Israel, he may have honestly doubted whether he were bound to marry Mahlon's *Moabitish* widow. Undoubtedly it was a sin against the law for Mahlon to have married her while she was a heathen, even if it were not a sin to take her now that she was a proselyte. Could, then, the widow of an illegal marriage claim quite the same rights with the widow of a legal marriage, even though she afterwards became a proselyte to the Hebrew faith? And if he was not bound to marry her, would it be prudent to marry her? Evidently he thinks it would not be prudent. He declines to redeem, on such terms, the inheritance of his dead kinsman, "lest I mar mine own inheritance." By which he meant, I think, that his doubt as to the right conferred on Ruth by the Hebrew law was reinforced by a Hebrew superstition. For, in Israel, marriage with the daughter of an alien race was held to be "unlucky," even when it was lawful. Many such marriages had proved unhappy and disastrous, and, by expressly calling Ruth *the Moabite* in his challenge, Boaz seems to have touched his kinsman's superstitious fears. No doubt the

calamities which had befallen Elimelech and Naomi were popularly attributed to their sojourn in the field of Moab. No doubt, the popular voice of Bethlehem affirmed that Chilion and Mahlon had been cut off before their time, because they had married "strange women." Here, then, was one Hebrew family in imminent danger of extinction solely because of such a marriage as was now proposed. The *goël* fears a similar fate. He fears that should he marry Ruth, he may "injure his own inheritance"—fears that he, too, may die before his time, and his name be put out of Israel. He, therefore, will run no risk: let Boaz run it, if he will.'

All we need say is, that Boaz ran the demands of the Levirate law as hard as he could, in the hope of securing for himself the rights of the *goël* in relation to Ruth.

### Sacrifice to Devils.

PSALM cvi. 37: 'Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils' (*Rev. Ver.*, 'demons').

**Question.**—*What form of idolatry is referred to under this term?*

**Answer.**—In all probability the worship of Moloch is meant. The actual word employed, and translated 'devils,' or 'demons,' is *Shêdim*, which literally means the same as Baalim, lords, or powers. We have no such notion of demons, or inferior gods, as was familiar to men in those ancient times. Our idea of Satan, or the devil, is altogether different, and we must not read this verse from the psalm as if the sons and daughters were sacrificed to our Satan. The Old Testament use of the term 'demons' is explained in Deut. xxxii. 17: 'They sacrificed unto demons, which were no God, to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came up of late.' The 'new gods' are the same as the 'demons.' The root of the Hebrew word is common to the Shemitic languages, and means 'to waste,' or 'to hurry away violently.' So *Shêdim* may fairly mean 'destroyers,' and its 'application here to the false gods points to the trait so deeply graven in all heathen worship, that of regarding the deities as malignant, and needing to be propitiated by human sufferings.'

The Apostle Paul takes up and uses this Old Testament idea of idol-gods as demons in 1 Cor. x. 20: 'But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have communion with devils.' (In the margin, the Revisers suggest the alternative *demons*.) St. Paul uses a word which, while it would not be needlessly offensive to Gentiles, conveyed his meaning. The Greeks themselves called

their deities *daimonia*, and St. Paul adopts the word ; but to Jewish ears it meant, not 'deities' or 'demigods,' but 'demons' or 'devils.'

There is existing in the world something which may correctly be called a worship of the devil, or the embodiment of the evil principle ; but we have no reason for thinking that this was in the mind of any of the Bible writers. A people called the *Yezidis*, or devil-worshippers, inhabit the countries situated between Persia and the north of Syria. *Layard* spent some time amongst them, and studied their customs and tenets with some care. He says : 'The name of the evil spirit, or principle, is never mentioned ; and any allusion to it by others so vexes and irritates them, that it is said they have put to death persons who have wantonly outraged their feelings by its use. So far is their dread of offending the evil principle carried, that they carefully avoid every expression which may resemble in sound the name of Satan, or the Arabic word for "accursed." The Yezidis believe Satan to be the chief of the angelic host, now suffering punishment for his rebellion against the Divine will, but still all-powerful, and to be restored hereafter to his high estate in the celestial hierarchy. He must be conciliated and revered, they say ; for as he now has the means of doing evil to mankind, so will he hereafter have the power of rewarding them.'

*Wordsworth* puts the explanation of Old Testament references to 'devils' into a sentence : 'Though idols themselves are nothing, yet to worship them is to worship the Evil Spirit, who works by them, and is the author of idolatry.'

## The 'Horns' used by Eastern Women.

I SAMUEL ii. 1 : 'My heart rejoiceth in the Lord ; mine horn is exalted in the Lord.'

**Question.**—*Is this a poetical figure, or does it refer to some custom peculiar to Eastern women ?*

**Answer.**—Scripture-writers take both views, but the reports of travellers and residents in Palestine make probable the reference to a distinct custom.

*Canon Spence* treats it as a purely poetical figure. 'The image "horn" is taken from oxen, and those animals whose strength lies in their horns. It is a favourite Hebrew symbol, and one that had become familiar to them from their long experience—dating from far back patriarchal times—as a shepherd people.'

Hannah is not rejoicing in a general way over God's goodness, but in a special and particular way over her new and honoured position

as a mother, which gave her such a triumph over her adversary, Peninnah. We should naturally expect her to find figures of speech from her womanly sphere of thought and association; and, meeting this expectation, *Jamieson*, in *Critical Commentary*, says: 'Allusion is here made to a peculiarity in the dress of Eastern females about Lebanon, which seems to have obtained anciently among the Israelite women, that of wearing a tin or silver horn on the forehead, on which their veil is suspended. Wives who have no children wear it projecting in an oblique direction, while those who *become mothers*, forthwith raise it a few inches higher, inclining towards the perpendicular, and by this slight but observable change in their head-dress, make known wherever they go the maternal character which they now bear.' We cannot fail to see what force and beauty this puts into Hannah's expression. She was proud of being thus able to lift her horn and show herself a mother; but she piously recognised that her horn was 'exalted in the Lord,' who had given her the honour in answer to her prayer.'

*Van Lennep* supports this view, but does not seem to have observed the custom of thus raising the veil. 'Our own opinion is, that this, in common with various other peculiar head-dresses put on at marriage, and worn during the remainder of life, has no reference whatever to the horns of animals, but is connected with the idea, very prevalent in the East, that the marriage ceremony constitutes the crowning of the virgin, who is thenceforth a queen. She is, indeed, so called in the liturgies of all the Oriental Churches, and the head-dress she then puts on for the first time bears a resemblance in varying degrees to a crown.'

The following description of the woman's horn, which seems to have originally been intended simply to keep the veil a little way off from the face, is very interesting: 'Besides the ring, chains, and bracelets which load the ears, neck, and arms of the Syrian ladies, they wear on the head a hollow horn, made either of silver or of copper silvered over, according to the wealth of the wearer; it rises obliquely from the forehead, and is similar in shape to that worn by the other sex. This horn, or tantour, is from fifteen to twenty inches long; its thickness gradually diminishes, the diameter of the larger extremity being about four inches, and that of the smaller extremity two inches. It is fastened to the forehead by means of straps, one passing under the chin, and another behind the head. The inclination of the horn forms an angle of from twenty to thirty degrees, and over it hangs a drapery of white muslin, with which the wearer may conceal her features at pleasure. The horn is never seen apart from

the veil. *Mr. Bruce* found the chiefs of Abyssinia wearing this distinction. The horns were about four inches long, made of silver, and in shape somewhat like an extinguisher. *Mr. Buckingham*, also, travelling in Palestine and Syria, a few years ago, saw females adorned with this remarkable head-dress.

## David's Moral Claim on Nabal.

1 SAMUEL xxv. 6-17 : Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand, unto thy servants, and to thy son David.'

**Question.**—*Had David any reasonable ground in the established customs of the age for a request which took so much the character of a demand?*

**Answer.**—Irregular service may be rendered, and in such cases an irregular request may be reasonably presented. Had David and his followers been a mere ravaging set of outlaws, from whose depredations no farmer was secure, it would have been the height of impertinence for him to ask a share of the yearly feasting. But David's plea was that he had been a valuable, though informal, defence to Nabal; and that while David's men had been in his neighbourhood, his usual losses, from robbers and wild beasts, had been reduced to a minimum. Nabal might reasonably have taken an opportunity thus presented of recognising and rewarding the service thus done to him. See verses 15, 16.

These sheepmasters' yearly feasts were to a large extent open feasts, to which wide invitations were given.

*Ewald* says: 'Since the inhabitants of these southern regions received little or no protection in person or property from Saul, they would have been constantly exposed to the rapacity of the tribes of the desert, had not David and his flying troop protected them. It was not therefore unreasonable of David to ask a share of the feast for his people.'

*Robinson* says: 'Now, on such a festive occasion as a sheep-shearing, near a town or village, an Arab sheik of the neighbouring desert would hardly fail to put in a word, either in person or by letter, and his message would be a transcript of that of David.'

*Jamieson* tells us that 'when such tribute is denied to the Arab chiefs, they are wont to enforce it as a right.'

*Kitto* says: 'It must have been a matter of much consideration to David, how to sustain and employ so large a body of men consistently with his purpose of not taking a hostile attitude towards the king, nor of giving the people any cause of complaint against him. He

found the means of employing them chiefly, it seems, in protecting the cattle in the wild and open border country, into which the great sheep-masters sent their flocks for pasture, from the depredations of their marauding neighbours, such as the Arabs, the Amalekites, the Jebusites, the Hittites, and others. This species of service creates a claim for a kind of tribute from the wealthy persons thus so essentially benefited, in food and other necessities, which is almost invariably most willingly, and even thankfully, rendered, and when not so, is enforced as a matter of right.'

*Ewald* further says: 'Apart from the Eastern custom of giving largely at such great merry-makings, according to which such a request would seem in no way strange, David had a certain right to ask a gift from Nabal's wealth. He had indirectly no small share in the festal joy of Nabal and his house. Without some part of the superfluity of the inhabitants whom he protected, he could not have maintained himself and his army.'

## Universal Sentiment concerning Hanging or Crucifying.

DEUTERONOMY xxi. 22, 23: 'And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God; ) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God hath given thee for an inheritance.' (See also Gal. iii. 13.)

**Difficulty.**—*Why should any peculiar disgrace attach to this method of death?*

**Explanation.**—There were important differences between ancient and modern modes of hanging, and what is referred to in this passage is what we should call 'gibbeting.' In our modern method of execution, we seek for the swiftest, easiest, and most painless form of death; but in earlier days there was a disposition to gloat over the dying agonies of criminals, and they were often exposed, both when dying and after death, to taunts which demoralized the taunters.

It seems that usually (according to the Rabbins) the criminal was strangled, and after death his body was hung up, as a public warning, and as a testimony of the vindication of law. But such a public exposition must be kept within careful limits; and it must never reach such an extreme point as to suggest revenge.

For sanitary reasons a corpse could not be left long unburied in that hot country; and it would be a most painful sight to see a body so hanging attacked by carrion birds.

The hanging also conveyed the sentiment that the victim was cursed of God and man, and so hung between the two, as unfit for either heaven or earth. Probably the special feeling attaching to this method of execution was due to the fact that it was adopted only for cases of idolatry and cursing of God.

*Prof. Lightfoot* renders the clause in verse 23, 'He that is hanged is a curse (*i.e.*, an insult, injury, or mockery) to God,' and he says that this was the popular Jewish interpretation at all events from the second century of the Christian era.'

*Dr. Zoekler* has collected valuable information concerning the practice of impalement, or crucifixion, and the sentiments associated with it. 'For the extraordinarily widespread, yea, almost unlimited prevalence of the punishment of the cross in the widest sense, among the better known pre-Christian peoples, evidence is afforded by the, to a large extent, well-supported ancient accounts which attest it. For the Indians, there are those referring to a time so early as that of the conquests of Semiramis, who scornfully threatens the Indian king, Stabrobates, with a nailing to the cross; for the Turanian people of the Scythians, to the north of Media, those referring to a period six hundred years before Christ, at the time of the Median king, Cyaxares; as concerns the Medes and Persians, there are those vouching for its existence among them under the kings of the line of Achæmenides, in the fifth and sixth centuries; for the people of Magna Grecia, its presence is attested in Sicily at the time of the elder Dionysius, of Syracuse, about the year B.C. 400, and often after that time; for the Macedonians, under Alexander the Great and his successors; even for the ancient Britons and the Frieslanders, whose custom, attested by Tacitus, for the first century of our era, of hanging their captives upon crosses or gibbets, unquestionably points back to an existence thereof in earlier ages. As concerns the Romans, crucifixions in the wider sense present themselves even in the history of their kings. The account in Livy, given in connection with the history of the Horatii, of a hanging upon a "tree of ill omen," no doubt refers to one which was effected by means of a cord, not by nailing, but, nevertheless, implies clearly enough an execution bearing the character of a punishment on the gallows—a shameful death by hanging. And as it reminds of the "hanging upon a tree" of the Old Testament, so, also, does the proceeding of Tarquinius Priscus, of which Pliny bears testimony, who, in the construction of the Cloaca Maxima, caused the bodies of those who had committed suicide, in order to escape the labour imposed upon them, to be attached to the cross, as a warning to other labourers. In its later

prevailing form, as an execution carried out mainly upon slaves, and those guilty of the graver offences,' its degrading character is clearly indicated.

## The Infection of Prophesying.

I SAMUEL xix. 24 : 'And he stripped off his clothes, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?'

**Difficulty.**—*How can the idea of a prophet, as a man in direct communication with God, be reconciled with such scenes of emotional excitement?*

**Explanation.**—*Ewald* very skilfully details the incidents of this remarkable day. 'It is related of those who started with the most hostile intentions against the prophets and their pupils, that as they approached they suddenly stood still, spell-bound by the music and solemn dance of the devotees; then, more and more powerfully drawn by the same spirit into the charmed circle, they broke forth into similar words and gestures; and then, flinging away their upper garments, they joined in the dance and the music, and sinking down into ecstatic quivering, utterly forgot the hostile spirit in which they had come. . . . The same thing befell fresh messengers a second, nay, a third time. Then Saul himself, enraged, rushed to Ramah . . . and as he looked down from the hill upon the school and heard the loud pealing songs rising from it, he was seized by the Divine Spirit, and when he at last reached the spot he sank into the same condition of enthusiasm still more deeply than all the messengers whom he had previously despatched.'

It is evident that the term 'prophesying' is used in more than one signification. It may mean, to foretell future events; it may mean, to deliver a message received directly from God. But it may also mean, and it certainly does sometimes mean, to be in a state of great emotional excitement, so that one's actions are swayed by the emotions rather than by the will. It was such a condition into which Saul passed; and such conditions are dangerously infectious. The modern illustrations of the condition are some forms of hysteria, excitements of revival services, passions which seize and carry away mobs, and the worked-up scenes of dervishes in Eastern lands. The mental and emotional laws which govern such conditions, and explain the infectious character of such scenes, are not well understood, but are a branch of study to which men are more and more directing attention in modern times.

It should also be remarked that the *spirit* spoken of here is not God the Holy Ghost, but the spirit of enthusiasm, the excitement regarded as having a spiritual source. There was no renewal of the Divine endowment which Saul had forfeited; there is only such an indication of a hopeful state as may be found in some remaining sensitiveness to religious influences. In his case it is painfully evident that times of excitement soon pass, leaving no permanent beneficial influence on the mind, or the heart, or the life.

At the college at Ramah, presided over by Samuel, religious young men were 'instructed in sacred learning and religious exercises, and were led to cultivate, especially by psalmody and music, the devotional feelings which might fit them, when occasion called, to become the messengers of God and teachers of the people.' This minstrelsy and song, with probably rhythmic movements of the body, are gathered into the word 'prophesyings.' We are to understand that Saul, putting off the garment which distinguished him as a king, joined the singers, entering so heartily and excitedly into all the engagements as to forget everything else, presently becoming so exhausted as to lie down in a deep sleep or trance.

It is remarkable that the unhinged condition of Saul's mind should be so clearly indicated in the fact that he yielded to the enthusiasm sooner, and in a much more extravagant degree, than his messengers had done.

*Van Lennep* says: 'It would be easy to trace a near resemblance between the "dervish associations" and the "schools of the prophets," as instituted by Samuel, and continued through the period of the Hebrew monarchy.'

## The Philistine Trespass-Offering.

**I SAMUEL vi. 3, 4:** 'And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return Him a guilt-offering; then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why His hand is not removed from you. Then said they, What shall be the guilt-offering which we shall return to Him? And they said, Five golden tumours, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Was the God of Israel likely to be propitiated by presents from a heathen people?*

**Answer.**—Since the God of Israel had been directly dealing with this heathen people in the way of *judgment*, there is nothing unreasonable in assuming that He would deal with them, in response to expressions of penitence, in a way of mercy. We are curiously limited by a notion, which has been allowed to settle in our minds,

that because Jehovah was in a special sense the God of the Jews, therefore He was the God of the Jews *only*, and not—what nevertheless He is most forcibly declared to have been, and to be—the ‘God of the whole earth.’ ‘In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him.’

The judgments of Jehovah on the Philistines took two forms : they were afflicted with a very painful and trying form of disease, involving local swellings, like tumours. These, in the absence of proper surgical skill, proved very fatal. And their fields were overrun with mice, which in the East are at times very destructive. An old traveller found such vast numbers of rats and field-mice in the country from Gaza northwards, that he says, ‘If nature had not provided a great plenty of birds which lived on them, the people could not have sown any seed that would not have been eaten.’

*Dr. C. Geikie* says : ‘The custom was general in antiquity of hanging up beside the altars, in the temples, such models of parts of the body that had been healed, or of objects recalling dangers from which one had been rescued. In those of Greece, for example, silver models of eyes, legs, arms, etc., were displayed in great numbers, a custom still seen in the Greek churches of Russia, or the Roman Catholic churches of Italy or Switzerland. But in the case of the Philistines, the images were not like these models, thankofferings for recovery granted, for the plague still raged when they were sent off. Nor can they be compared to the talismans or amulets of astrologers and magicians of ancient or later times, which were regarded as charms to effect cures or avert evils, though the details respecting such wonder-working fancies are very curious. The Philistine images were representations of the instruments by which punishment had been inflicted on them, and an acknowledgment that these calamities—the field-mice and the plague—had not come by chance, but had been inflicted by the God of Israel, for their having taken His ark into captivity. A similar custom has prevailed from the remotest times in India. Thus *Tavernier* tells us, that when a pilgrim undertakes a journey to a pagoda, to be cured of a disease, he offers to the idol a present, either in gold, silver, or copper, according to his ability, in the shape of the diseased or injured member, and such a gift is recognised as a practical acknowledgment that the suffering or evil endured has been inflicted by the god.’

*Canon Spence* says : ‘The priests and diviners thought that the Hebrew Deity, in some way resident in the “golden chest,” was a childish, capricious deity, like one of their own loved gods—Dagon, or Beelzebub, the lord of flies. Their people had insulted him ; he

had shown himself powerful enough, however, to injure his captors, so the insults must cease, and he must be appeased with rich offerings.'

## The Book of Jasher.

JOSHUA x. 13: 'Is not this written in the Book of Jashar?' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Is it possible for us to form any idea of the contents of this lost book?*

**Answer.**—It is only mentioned in one other Scripture passage, 2 Sam. i. 18, from which we learn that it contained the lamentation of David over Saul and Jonathan, which was recorded under the heading, 'The Song of the Bow.' Both the extracts preserved from it for us are of a poetical character; the one being a national song of triumph, the other a national elegy. The word *Jasher*, or more correctly *Jashar*, is most probably an appellation of theocracy, that is, of the people of Israel considered as the Covenant people, and it has much the same force as the word *Jeshurun* (Deut. xxxii. 15).

*Ewald* thinks that the book illustrated 'by historical songs, how an upright man in Israel, a Joshua or a Jonathan, should live; what glorious victories he could achieve; what glory he would gain.' We may assume that the collection was compiled by degrees. It must be carefully distinguished from the Book of Psalms, and should be regarded as a gathering up of heroic poems, which were composed on the occasion of great national events. No separate book, known by the title of *Jasher*, was extant among the Jews after the Christian era. Bishop Lowth imagined that it was a collection of national songs, so called, because the book probably commenced with the words *âz yâshir*, 'then sang,' etc. In all nations there has been a constant disposition to preserve the record of great national deeds in heroic song; and, though not a literary people, it may reasonably be supposed that the Israelites followed the common impulse. The existence of Moses' song and Deborah's suffice to prove that such poems were composed on great occasions.

*Dr. Donaldson* has attempted the reconstruction of this Book of *Jasher* from the fragments which, according to his theory, he traces through several books of the Old Testament. A brief account of his views we take from *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. 'Assuming that, during the tranquil and prosperous reign of Solomon, an unwonted impulse was given to Hebrew literature, that the worshippers of Jehovah were desirous of possessing something on which their faith might rest, the book of *Jasher*, or *uprightness*, was written, or rather

compiled, to meet this want. Its object was to show that in the beginning man was upright, but had by carnal wisdom forsaken the spiritual law; that the Israelites had been chosen to preserve and transmit this law of uprightness; that David had been made king for his religious integrity, etc. The compiler of the book was probably Nathan the prophet, assisted by Gad, the seer. It was thus "the first offering of the prophetic schools, and ministered spiritual food to the greater prophets." Dr. Donaldson thinks it contained the religious marrow of the Holy Scriptures. Whatever fragments in the sacred books of the Hebrews exhibit the nature of uprightness, celebrate the victories of the true Israelites, predict their prosperity, or promise future blessedness, have, according to this theory, a claim to be considered among the relics of the Book of Jasher.'

In estimating the argumentative value of a quotation from this Book of Jasher, such as given in Joshua x., we must make due account of the fact that it contained *poetry*, and poetry of the unrestrained, and often extravagant, ancient and Eastern type. Poetic figures can never be made into proofs of anything, or even into precise explanations of anything.

## Tops of Houses.

1 SAMUEL ix. 25: 'And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house' (*Rev. Ver.*, 'housetop').

**Difficulty.**—*Housetops seem singular places to which to take friends for private conversation.*

**Explanation.**—It is commonly known that the roofs of Eastern houses were flat; but Bible readers are not so familiar with the various uses to which they were put, and the arrangements made for their adaptation to the family needs. A parapet all round made them quite safe; a special staircase gave access, so that persons could get on the roof without going through the rooms; the air was cool there, so that persons often slept on the roofs; awnings were set up; sometimes the household work was done there; and private meditations, or consultations with friends, were often conducted there. It should be remembered that houses covered a large space, and were only one, or at most two, stories high, built round an interior courtyard; so that there was a good space of roof which really served much the same purpose as our gardens, round which friends often walk holding private conference. *Canon Spence* says: 'He conducted him to the flat roof of his house, often the favourite

locality in the East for quiet conversation and rest, and where frequently the honoured guest was lodged for the night: there the prophet had a long interview with his young guest.' Curiously, the Septuagint reads, 'they strewed a couch for Saul on the top of the house, and he lay down.' But as the serious conversation about the kingship was held next morning, this is not unlikely to represent the fact that occurred. There is abundant authority for the custom of providing temporary accommodation for visitors on the flat roofs. It is indeed the pleasantest place for sleeping in the hot season. Slight shelters are raised on it to protect the sleeper from the dew, and mats are thought sufficient as beds.

*Perkins* gives a good account of these Eastern roofs. 'The roofs of the houses in Persia are flat, and terraced over with earth. Stout timbers are first laid across the walls, about two feet apart. These are covered over with small split sticks of wood, at intervals of perhaps three inches, on which are spread rush mats. Then succeeds a thick layer of a rank thorny wood, which grows abundantly on the mountains, in a bushy, globular form, a foot or two in diameter. This weed is so resinous as not soon to decay—is an excellent article of light fuel, and is much used for burning brick, heating ovens, etc. It may be that "grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven," as mentioned by our Saviour. Upon the thick layer of this wood is spread a coat of clay mortar, and trodden down, and next a stratum of dry earth, six or eight inches deep, over which is plastered a layer of mixed straw and mud. An occasional depression of the back edge of the roof, furnished with a spout a few feet long, conducts off the water. The soil is so tenacious in all parts of Persia that there is little danger of a roof thus constructed being pervious to rain, if kept in a state of good repair. It should be annually plastered over with the straw and mud, which will be worn and washed off by the exposure of a season, and snow must be thrown off with a shovel as soon as it falls. These flat roofs are pleasant promenades for summer evening walks, and the natives usually sleep upon them during the warm season for the sake of the cool air and freedom from vermin. There is no exposure in thus sleeping out, as there is no dew in Persia. The roofs should be secured with balustrades, that one family may not gaze upon the other's premises. Persian law sanctions the stoning, without trial or mercy, of all who are guilty of such an offence; and the reader will recollect the sad misfortune and sin into which King David fell, in consequence of indulging an idle curiosity while walking upon the terrace.'

*Burder* says : 'The houses in the East were in ancient times, as they are still, generally built in one and the same uniform manner. The roof or top of the house is always flat, covered with broad stones, or a strong plaster of terrace, and guarded on every side with a low parapet wall. The terrace is frequented as much as any part of the house. On this, as the season favours, they walk, they eat, they sleep, they transact business, they perform their devotions. The house is built with a court within, into which chiefly the windows open ; those that open to the street are so obstructed with lattice-work that no one without or within can see through them. Whenever, therefore, anything is to be seen or heard in the streets, everyone immediately goes up to the housetop to satisfy his curiosity. In the same manner, when anyone had occasion to make anything public, the readiest and most effectual way of doing it was to proclaim it from the housetops to the people in the streets.' (See *Isai. xxii. 1.*)

*Van Lannep* further illustrates this use of the housetops. 'When anything of public interest is occurring in the streets, the poorer houses having no upper stories with windows, the men and boys rush out and line the thoroughfare, while the veiled women and girls are seen ranged along the edges of the terraced roofs, or leaning over parapets. When successive shots are heard in the town, announcing an accidental conflagration, or the breaking in of a cruel foe whose progress is marked by fire and sword, men, women, and children hasten to the housetop, and gaze in anxious groups as long as the danger lasts. On the occurrence of a death in the dwelling, mourners, especially priests, are stationed upon the housetops, and attract public attention by their lamentations. And a proclamation is often made, as well as an address to the people, from the flat roof of a government house, which looks down upon the meidan, or public square.'

### Idolatries referred to by Ezekiel.

**EZEKIEL viii. 10 :** 'All the idols of the house of Israel.'

**Question.**—*What special features of idolatry were, on this occasion, brought to the notice of Ezekiel?*

**Answer.**—It is uniformly observed that those who become perverts, giving up one religion and accepting another, are very extravagant and intense in their zeal for the new system which they adopt. In many cases there is also found a great readiness to change again when a change has once been made. The Israelites became perverts. Once loosened from the sole and supreme claims of

Jehovah, they were easily enticed by the heathen and idolatrous systems of the nations immediately around them.

The more prominent systems which they adopted were (1) that of the Canaanites, whom they were to have driven wholly out of the land, but who were weakly left to become a snare. In connection with these we may refer to the influence of the coarse forms of idolatry established among the Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, etc., nations closely associated with Israel. (2) The next great influence was exerted by Phœnician Baalism, in its various forms; the principal patrons of this licentious system being Ahab and his priestess-wife Jezebel. (3) It is singular to find that the Egyptian idolatry so little influenced the Israelites before the time of the later and decaying monarchy. The idea of Aaron's calf, and the idea of Jeroboam's calves, may be traced to Egyptian associations, but even though Solomon married an Egyptian princess, the rites of that country seemed to gain little favour in Israel, until the later kings sought alliance with Egypt as a defence against the invasion of Assyria. The prophet Ezekiel lived in a time when the apostates from Jehovah were wildly seeking safety in the help of all the gods of whom they could hear.

Brief notices may be given of the more prominent forms of idolatry to which Ezekiel refers. Our information is taken from a valuable additional note in the *Speaker's Commentary*.

1. *Canaanite Worship*.—The children of Israel, when they entered the land of promise, found the inhabitants devoted to nature-worship, expressed in rites most cruel and impure. These rites too soon proved very attractive to the conquerors, and retained their hold up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, though often repressed by pious rulers, and often partially supplanted by new and more popular forms of idolatry. Possibly the idolatry of the high places was a relic of the Canaanite system.

2. *Egyptian Idolatry*.—*Professor Wilkins* explains that the 'religion of the Egyptians was too sensuous, too subtle, and too formal and petty in its details to present any very great attractions to the simpler and less artificial Hebrews, and it was soon made still more distasteful to them when its adherents became their cruel oppressors.' We have never felt quite satisfied that Aaron made his calf in imitation of the Egyptian Apis or Mnevis. We have the impression that the form given to Aaron's visible representative of the absent God must have had some patriarchal association. The idea of Aaron copying the idol figure of the oppressors' religion is very difficult to entertain. It is more likely that the calf was the tribal sign of the Hebrews, as a pastoral people.

However that may be, there can be no doubt that Ezekiel makes reference to the idolatry of Egypt as, in his time, established in Judah. Possibly it was introduced when Pharaoh Necho for a time subjected the land to his sway. (2 Kings xxiii. 34.) Referring to the underground places used for abominable rites, the *Speaker's Commentary* says: 'Belzoni's discoveries in the early part of the present century brought to light many subterranean chambers in rocks upon the shores of the Nile. These were used as sepulchres both for kings and private persons. The walls were uniformly adorned by painted figures, depicting embassies from foreign nations, or the occupations of ordinary life, and by hieroglyphical characters, some of which were representative of the objects of idolatrous worship. The most remarkable of these chambers are the Tombs of the Kings at Biban-el-Molouk, and also at Gourneh near Thebes. Belzoni found access into one of these by a *hole in the wall*, which gave no sign of a regular entrance. We have no evidence that these sepulchral chambers were used as places of worship, but their position, and the adornments, some of which at least were objects of idolatry, fitted them for the scene of the ideal picture by which Ezekiel represented Egyptian idolatry.'

3. *Baalism*.—Some think that Baal, Moloch, and Chemosh were originally different names of the same divinity; but by Baalism we distinctively mean the Phœnician system introduced into Israel by the dynasty of Omri. Baalim and Ashtoreth, in the plural form, represent the plurality of the host of heaven; and Baalism was really the worship of the heavenly bodies. *Professor Wilkins* tells us that the great Nature-power, the Sun-god, Baal, was viewed in three ways: 1. As Baal Samim, or Adonis, the fresh young sun of spring, full of creative force, calling all vegetable life into luxuriant fertility, and kindling in the animal world the fire of youthful passion. 2. As the fierce sun of summer, like Tantalus, burning up the fruits and flowers that owe their life to him—Baal, Mars, or Moloch, the terrible god of fire. 3. As the principle of order, unity, and steadfastness in the universe—the power which held the world together when the beautiful Adonis had been slain by the fury of Moloch, which, albeit in gloom and darkness, husbanded and gathered the exhausted powers of nature for new creative exertions, when the world should be gladdened again by the birth of the life-giving sun of spring; this was Baal-Chewan, identified with Saturn.

4. *Sun-Worship*, distinct from the Baal representations. The worship of the heavenly bodies was one of the earliest forms of idolatry (Job xxxi. 26), and was expressly forbidden in the law

(Deut. xvii. 3). But among the Arabians, in its earliest form, it was conducted without the intervention of images, the adoration being addressed to the heavenly bodies themselves. This form, continued among the Persians, seems to have been introduced afresh into Jerusalem at the time of Ezekiel (viii. 16). Connected with this form of idolatry were the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun (2 Kings xxiii. 11), and probably the altars which were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz (2 Kings xxiii. 12), and the images (marg. 'sun-images') of Ezekiel vi. 4, 6, which were columns set up in honour of the sun, not images in human form. These columns would make a kind of sun-dial by their shadows.

5. *Thammuz-Worship*.—A form of nature-worship, like the worship of Adonis. 'The death of Adonis symbolized the suspension of the productive powers of nature, which were in due time revived. The excitements attendant on this alternate wailing and rejoicing, which was especially popular among the women, led by inevitable consequence to unbridled license and excess. This was in Ezekiel's day one of the most detestable forms of idolatry.'

## The Evil-Eye.

1 SAMUEL xviii. 9: 'And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.'

**Question.**—*Can this reference be supposed to give Scriptural sanction to the superstitious notions that are entertained concerning the 'evil-eye'?*

**Answer.**—Certainly not. It simply reflects the notions and sentiments of the age, and leaves us free to correct those notions with the aid of our more full and accurate medical and scientific knowledge. It was the eye of jealousy and of revengeful purpose with which Saul looked on David—a diseased eye; but the *looking* would, of itself, do David no mischief.

Thomson, in *Land and Book*, says: 'The belief in the malignant potency of the evil-eye is very prevalent with all classes of Syrian society. So ridiculously afraid are they of this blight, that, if you merely *look* at a child, especially if it be pretty, you must repeat the name of the prophet, of God, or of the Virgin, with a brief petition for protection, or at least say, Mâshallah (an exclamation of admiration or praise to God). If you extol the beauty of a horse, you must immediately spit on it; and the same is done sometimes to a child; more frequently, however, they merely blow in its face and repeat a charm. The bright red or white figures made on fig-trees

are designed to attract the eye from the fruit, lest it should wither and fall. In short, against this mysterious source of evil there are countless charms and counter-charms.'

*Gadsby* has some curious notes on the superstitious customs connected with belief in the 'evil-eye.' 'In some parts, as soon as a child is born it is covered with amulets; and a piece of mud, duly blessed by the priests, and softened in holy water, which is believed to possess a peculiar charm, is plastered on its forehead, to keep off what is called the "evil-eye." Even horses and camels are made to wear charms, and children have them in cases on their foreheads, to keep off the evil-eye. I was once at Mrs. M.'s, at Boulac, when two Turkish ladies came to see her. One of them took Mrs. M.'s little boy into her arms, exclaiming, "Mâshallah!" (It is God's will); when Mrs. M., mother-like, said, "Look at his fat legs!" "Oh!" both the ladies exclaimed, "Mâshallah!" (It was God's will that the boy should have fat legs), and immediately spat on the floor. This was to prevent any ill effects from Mrs. M.'s remark.'

'We were talking about Hajji's boy one day, when Hajji, who is remarkably quick of hearing, overheard us. Shortly afterwards I went out and saw the boy with a very nicely striped vest on, of various colours. "Hajji," said I, "what has the boy put that on for?" "You talk about my boy," he replied. "And is that to keep off the evil-eye?" I asked. He laughed, and said, "Who tell you that? That is true, Mr. Gadsby. Maloom, maloom" (Certainly, certainly). "You know all, everything, like God."

'In confirmation of my remarks about the evil-eye, I may quote Mr. Wortabot, a Syrian, who says: "If there is anything which horrifies the parents in Syria more than another, it is to have their boy praised; and were the child to die after praises had been lavished on him, most assuredly they would lay the evil at the door of those who had praised him."

*Mr. Lane* says: 'It is often the case that those children who are most petted and beloved are the dirtiest and worst clad. Their mothers purposely leave them unwashed from fear of the evil-eye; but at the same time, perhaps, they will be half covered with ornaments. The effort is to keep you from admiring the child. You may admire the ornaments, but not the child, lest some evil should befall it.'

In heathen lands the belief in the evil-eye very extensively prevails. An enemy is supposed to be able, by a look, to bewitch persons and even cattle.

## The Weight of the Ammonite Crown.

2 SAMUEL xii. 30 : 'And he took the crown of their king from off his head ; and the weight thereof was a talent of gold, and in it were precious stones ; and it was set on David's head.'

**Difficulty.**—*It would surely be impossible for anyone to bear the weight of such a crown.*

**Explanation.**—It is probable that reference is intended to the crown of the Ammonite god, and not of the Ammonite king. In the Hebrew 'their king' is expressed by the one word *Malcom*, which is also the name of the great idol of the Ammonites ; and although no living man could wear a crown of one hundred pounds weight, a god of metal, wood, or stone, might support a head-dress much heavier. It is probable, then, that the crown was taken from the head of Malcom, or Moloch, the Ammonite god, not from the Ammonite king.

There still remains the difficulty of this heavy crown being placed on the head of David. The translation says that the crown was ornamented with precious stones ; but the Hebrew mentions *only one* stone. Possibly there was one large stone set in the huge crown, and this stone may have been transferred to the royal crown of David.

Two other suggestions have been made. Instead of the 'weight,' we should read the 'value.' They took the crown, which was valued at a talent, and there were precious stones in it. —

Others suppose that the crown was melted down, purified, and refined, and made anew for David, and adorned with its jewels, and then set upon David's head.

*Dr. Gardiner* says : 'The silver talent was above a hundred pounds, and the gold talent twice as much. But there were various other Eastern talents, as the Babylonian and Persian, of much smaller weight, and it is not unlikely that a light talent may have been in use among the Ammonites. The weight, however, on any reasonable supposition, would have been too great to allow of this crown being commonly worn.'

*Kitto* gives some good reasons for thinking that the English Version is correct, and that the weight of the crown is intended. It was probably a crown used only for a short time on great state ceremonials. Crowns are only so used in the East, or indeed anywhere else ; and they are generally of such weight that they cannot long be borne without inconvenience. The 'weight of a crown' is not only a figurative truth, but a material fact. Sir Harford Jones Brydges, who had an opportunity of examining the Persian regalia at leisure,

describes the crown of state as excessively heavy. The same ambassador relates that, happening to look back, on quitting the audience-chamber, he saw the king lifting the crown from his head, as if anxious to relieve himself from its oppressive weight. But the ponderous crowns were not always even worn upon the head; they were sometimes suspended over it, or attached to the top of the throne. Several crowns of great size and weight thus used are mentioned by Athenæus and by Pliny. Among them, one is described by the former writer as being composed of 10,000 pieces of gold, and placed on the throne of King Ptolemy. Benjamin of Tudela speaks of a crown of gold and gems suspended over the throne of the Emperor Commenes. Some of the Rabbins have a curious conceit, that the Ammonitish crown was kept in suspension by a loadstone, as if the loadstone attracted gold as well as iron.

## Uncleanness by Contact with the Dead.

NUMBERS xix. 11: 'He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.'

**Difficulty.**—*Did not this regulation needlessly add to the family trouble and anxiety in times of death?*

**Explanation.**—In the hot Eastern countries it was supremely necessary to secure sanitary precautions in connection with disease and death, and the earliest possible burial of the dead, and the affixing of seven days' uncleanness, and consequent separation from family life, for all who touched the dead, in a very simple way effected both these ends, and a little family disability might well be borne cheerfully for the sake of the common weal.

Those who tended the body to the grave would be glad to have the burial over as soon as possible, so that their separation time might not be prolonged; and, in cases of death from infectious diseases, seven days would suffice to develop the germs of the disease, if the nurse had taken it.

This is the simplest explanation, and it is sufficient; but it has further been suggested that Moses may have intended to correct a practice not uncommon in the East, of leaving the dead to be devoured by wild beasts. And it may also have been designed as a reproof of the unnatural system of embalming, with which the Hebrews had been familiarized in Egypt.

Seeking for the deeper religious significance of this regulation, we note that God revealed His mind and will to men, in the older days, through their lives and relations. He treated death as the comple-

tion, the representative, of sin ; and His treatment of death, and of those directly related to death, was designed to carry home to men's hearts His view of *sin*. How terrible a thing that must be, only the touch of which brought seven days' separation ! It was really sin ; for ' sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'

### Plucking off the Shoe as a Testimony.

RUTH iv. 7 : ' Now this was the custom in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, for to confirm all things ; a man drew off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour : and this was the manner of attestation in Israel ' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*There does not appear to be any rational connection between taking off a shoe, and passing it to another, and the sealing of a business or family contract.*

**Explanation.**—Several accounts are given of this ancient custom, and we cannot readily decide to which the preference should be given. As no documents were used in ancient times, but all business-contracts were made in public, at the gates of the cities, we can understand that some formal ceremony would be gone through, which witnesses might observe. And, as the contracts usually concerned the transfer of land, the ceremony would be one specially significant to *such* contracts, and made to apply to all others. We may compare our way of putting the finger on the seal of a deed, after signing it, and repeating the words, ' So help me God.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* regards the transfer of the shoe as a symbol of the transfer of the property ; and a public acknowledgment that he, to whom the shoe was given, might tread on the property as his own by the same right as he, who gave the shoe, had formerly trodden upon it. Our interest in Ruth prevents us from fully recognising that the business done was really a transfer of rights to Naomi's property, and that the matter of Ruth was only what we should call a condition of the purchase of the land. The ceremony of the shoe was, therefore, strictly appropriate.

*Dr. S. Cox* reminds us that while this was the legal form for confirming or binding legal or commercial transactions, it was associated, in a special way, with the faithfulness of a family *goël* to his obligations. The Mosaic rule is given in Deut. xxv. 5-10, and runs as follows : ' If kinsmen dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry outside' (*i.e.* outside the family circle), ' unto a stranger ; her husband's kinsman shall go in unto her, and take her to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's kinsman unto her. And it shall be

that the firstborn whom she beareth shall stand upon the name' (*i.e.* take the place, or arise in the place) 'of the kinsman who is dead, that his name be not wiped out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his kinsman's wife, then let his kinsman's wife go up to the gate, unto the elders, and say, My husband's kinsman refuseth to raise up unto his kinsman a name in Israel; he will not do the duty of my husband's kinsman. Then the elders of the city shall call him, and speak unto him; and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; then shall his kinsman's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face' (probably it should read, 'spit before his face'), 'and shall answer and say, So let it be done unto the man who will not build up his kinsman's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, House of the Shoe taken off' (*i.e.*, anyone might call him 'Baresole,' without committing a legal offence); his family would be stigmatised as the family of a shoeless or barefooted vagabond, '*shoeless* fellow' being equivalent to '*miserable* fellow,' since it was only in extreme penury and misery that the Hebrews went barefoot. In the case of Boaz the indignity of the spitting was avoided, probably by the matter being treated simply as one of land transfer; the kinsman's scruples as to marrying a Moabitess being admitted.

Illustrating the symbolic use of the shoe from Indian customs, *Roberts* says: 'Does a priest, a father, or a respectable friend, resolve to go on a pilgrimage to some distant country; some one will perhaps say, "Ah, he will never return; he intends to remain in those holy places." Should he deny it, then they say, "Give us your shoes as a witness of your promise," and having done so, never will he break it. An affectionate widow never parts with her late husband's shoes; they are placed near her when she sleeps; she kisses and puts her head upon them, and nearly every time after bathing she goes to look at them. These, therefore, are the "testimony," the melancholy confirmation of her husband's death.'

The association of the shoe with marriage customs in Barbary is illustrated by *Urquhart*, in his work *Pillars of Hercules*: 'At a Jewish marriage I was standing beside the bridegroom when the bride entered; and, as she crossed the threshold, he stooped down and slipped off his shoe, and struck her with the heel on the nape of the neck. I at once saw the interpretation of the passage in Scripture respecting the transfer of the shoe to another, in case the brother-in-law did not exercise his privilege. The slipper, being taken off indoors, is placed at the edge of the small carpets on which you sit, and is at hand to administer correction, and is here used in sign of the obedience of the wife and the supremacy of the husband.'

## David's Dancing.

2 SAMUEL vi. 16: 'And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.'

**Question.**—*What was the dancing referred to here, and why did it excite the contempt of this princess?*

**Answer.**—Nothing of the character of our set dances, as at balls and parties, can be intended here. In ancient times they had no idea of what we call 'dance-music,' nor of arranging movements in response to formal music. Always and everywhere emotions of joy and sorrow express themselves in movements and gestures of the body. Children always did, and always will, dance. In David's case we have simply the natural rhythmical movements of body which find expression for pleasurable excitements. 'The dance is spoken of in Holy Scripture universally as symbolical of some rejoicing. In the earlier period it is found combined with some song or *refrain*, and with the tambourine, or timbrel, more especially in those impulsive outbursts of popular feeling which cannot find sufficient vent in voice or in gesture. Nor is there any more strongly popular element traceable in the religion of the ancient Jews than the opportunity so given to a prophet or prophetess to kindle enthusiasm for Jehovah on momentous crises of national joy, and thus root the theocracy in their deepest feelings, more especially in those of the women, themselves most easily stirred, and most capable of exciting others. The dance was regarded even by the Romans as the worship of the body, and thus had a place amongst sacred things.'

We can get a better idea of Eastern dancing from the movements of the Italians in our streets, who dance to the sound of their tambourines, than from the dancing of evening parties.

What occurred on the festive day, to which this passage refers, seems to have been as follows: When David found the Divine blessing was resting on his better-advised plan for removing the ark, and was granting him good success, he sacrificed seven bullocks and seven rams; and 'when this act of worship was completed, a procession was formed, David laying aside his heavy royal robe, girding himself with a priestly ephod, joining in the procession, sharing, and even leading, the excitement of delight with which it moved toward the city of Zion, and its appointed resting-place. The clang of symbols, the blast of trumpets, the chant of priests, the shout of the people, all raised David's feeling of joy to so high a pitch, that when the gates of the city were entered, and the music waxed

louder, and started the natural rhythmical movement known as dancing, David could not restrain himself, but joined in the measured movement, the swaying to and fro, and round and round, that must have been very similar to the dancing now practised by the Eastern dervishes.'

*Kitto* suggests that David took the place as leader of the choir of women with timbrels and dances'; the position of Miriam in the olden time, perhaps the position which Michal ought to have taken.

*A. Lapidé* compares the history of Sir Thomas More, who, when Lord Chancellor of England, sometimes took his place, and sang in the choir of his parish church, in a surplice. And when the Duke of Norfolk expostulated with him, as Michal did with David, for degrading himself and the king's service, he said, 'Nay, your Grace may not think that the king my master will be offended with me for the serving of God his master.'

'It is evident that when the king danced before the ark, he laid aside his robe, and wore only his ephod and drawers. Michal, his wife, looked through a window, and, seeing what she considered his undignified dress and demeanour, despised him in her heart, and reproached him in language which seems very natural to an Oriental ear.'—*Van Lennep*.

## In what Sense was Samuel 'lent to the Lord'?

1 SAMUEL i. 28: 'Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord' *Margin*, 'returned;'  
(*Rev. Ver.*, 'granted').

**Difficulty.**—*Seeing that there was no place for a child in the Mosaic ritual, whence could Hannah have obtained the notion of consecrating her boy to the Tabernacle service?*

**Explanation.**—Hannah's act is certainly difficult for us to understand. According to the Mosaic law, every first-born male child belonged of right to God, and must be devoted to Him. The idea seems to have been that such a child must be offered in sacrifice to Him, and of this idea we find the relic in the prophetic exclamation, 'Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the good of my soul?' Moses arranged for the redemption of the first-born by the offering of victims in their stead. Hannah, regarding her child as a special gift from God, and possibly, in a prophetic way, anticipating for him an extraordinary career, refused to redeem her boy, but returned him to the Lord, that he might be a living, life-long sacrifice, in himself a testimony for the supreme claims of Jehovah to all an Israelite was, and to all he had. It is

not sufficiently recognised that in Samuel we have the ideal of a 'living sacrifice.'

This, however, does not meet the difficulty of a mere child being left at the Tabernacle. Perhaps Samuel was older than at first sight appears, when his mother left him with Eli. If he was only just weaned from the usual Eastern three years' nursing, it is certain that he would still be needing daily motherly care; but this could readily have been found, as the wives of the priests would be lodging in close association with the tabernacle, and we cannot suppose Eli to have dwelt within the tabernacle itself. Tents for the priests may have been set up in the sides of the Tabernacle, and within the enclosed space. Hannah, must, however, have acted on a Divine inspiration, for she had no precedent for her scheme; and this inspiration Eli must have recognised, and regarded as sufficient reason for his permitting so strange and unusual a thing.

On the probable age of Samuel when taken to Eli, a very curious suggestion has been made by *Comestor*, who wrote in A.D. 1473, which would greatly relieve the difficulty of the case, if we could confidently accept it. He says that there was a *threefold* weaning of children in old times: the first from the mother's milk, when they were three years old; the second from their tender age, and the care of a nurse when they were seven years of age; and the third from childish ways when they reached the age of twelve. We can imagine Samuel would be of some service in waiting on Eli at the age of seven, but twelve is the yet more likely age.

Samuel was not designed for a priest, and no one concerned in his childhood seems to have had any intimation of the work that would be entrusted to him. He was to be a prophet, the first of the prophetic order, and the founder of that order. He was to mediate between the people and God in the matter of appointing a king for the nation; and he was to maintain the supreme claims of Jehovah under the new regime. It was an essential to his efficiency for this work that the public impression concerning him should be that of a man wholly devoted to God from infancy. Wherever Samuel went throughout his life, he was felt to be, in himself, a witness for God. There is still, and there always will be, a specially gracious power upon us of those men and women among us who are known to have served God from their childhood.

*Dean Stanley* dwells on the importance of Samuel's relation to the older Mosaic system, which was now to undergo important modifications. 'He had been brought up and nurtured in the ancient system. His childhood had been spent in the Sacred Tent of Shiloh, the last

relic of the wanderings of the desert. His early dedication to the sanctuary belonged to that age of vows of which the excess appears in the rash and hasty vows of Jephthah, of Saul, and of the assembly at Mizpah; in the more regular, but still peculiar and eccentric, devotion of Samson to the life of a Nazarite.

## Marriage with a Wife's Sister.

LEVITICUS xviii. 18: 'Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister . . . beside the other in her life-time.'

**Difficulty.**—*Does the limitation of this command involve liberty to enter into this relationship when the condition of limitation is removed?*

**Explanation.**—We have no concern in these paragraphs with the social and ecclesiastical controversies which have gathered round this subject. We can only attempt to remove the literary difficulties of the passage.

The term which is translated 'sister,' *achoth*, may mean a sister in blood-relationship, but Bishop Wordsworth admits that 'it is not certain whether the word "achoth" is to be here rendered *a sister in blood*. It is remarkable that the phrases which would be literally rendered "a woman to her sister," and "a man to his brother," occur more than thirty times in the Hebrew Bible, and never in these instances designate the *blood*-relationship of two sisters or two brothers, but simply the addition of one person or thing to another of the same kind. Accordingly, in the margin of our Authorised Version, the words are rendered here, *one wife to another*. So the words are here understood by Junius, Tremellius, Drusius, Calovius, Beza, Ainsworth, Willett, Hammond, Schleusner, etc.'

If the verse be only a prohibition of polygamy, we can clearly understand the character of the limitation, *in her life-time*. A man may not bring to his home a second wife while his first wife lives, but he is free to bring the person he favours to his home as a wife when the first wife is dead. The law in respect to second marriages is referred to by the Apostle Paul as well recognised. (See Romans vii. 1-3.)

But if the force of the limitation be thus admitted, it must be applied in exactly the same way to the particular case of the desired second wife being the first wife's sister. The prohibition refers only to the conduct of a man during his wife's life-time.

Without going beyond the language of the verse, we must admit, (1) that it is very doubtful whether a wife's sister is referred to in it; and (2) that, if she is, the law of second marriage applies to her as to any other woman. But the *permissible* is not always the *advisable*.

## The Woman-Owner of *Ôb*.

1 SAMUEL xxviii. 7: 'Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.'

**Difficulty.**—*This appears to recognise the wizards and witches as really having some occult power at their command.*

**Explanation.**—Literally the expression used is 'the woman mistress, or owner, of *Ôb*.' Probably the word *ôb* means 'a skin bottle' (Job xxxii. 19), and it is apparently employed to denote the distended belly of the ventriloquist, the man who can make sounds appear to come from different quarters. It was in accordance with the common sentiment of the times, to think of a *spirit* as speaking from the belly of the ventriloquist; but we regard such abilities merely as special endowments, connected with a peculiar sensitiveness of certain parts of the body.

It is quite certain that there were claims made, in ancient times, of power to deal with the world of the dead, and with the world of spirits; but it will always be disputed whether these claims had any substantial basis, or were merely the delusions of superstition. Our idea is that when mesmerism, animal magnetism, thought-reading, and spiritualism are more fully understood, there will be abundant material for the explanation of all that is known concerning witches, oracles, sorcerers, necromancers, etc. In this narrative the woman is so surprised at the actual appearance of Samuel, that it is certain she had no power really to call up the dead, and could only have attempted to satisfy Saul by skilful rites and delusions.

This view, however, is not usually taken, and *Canon Spence* expresses, with caution, the hesitating admission of some kind of occult power at the command of the ancient sorcerers. Quoting *Keil* thus, 'Prophesying by the *Ôb* was probably performed by calling up a departed spirit from Sheol, and obtaining prophecies, that is, disclosures, concerning one's own fate through the medium of such a spirit,' *Canon Spence* adds, 'No other commentator touches on the *ôb* here, and *Keil* leaves it in doubt as to whether he considered the *ôb* was some special spirit devoted to the service of the mistress of the *ôb*, or the spirit or soul of one already dead, who, through some occult power, was to be brought back again for a season to this earth. As far as we can judge of these old mysteries, the sorcerer or sorceress possessed, or was supposed to possess, a "familiar." Through the aid of this "familiar," the departed spirit was compelled or induced to revisit this world, and to submit to

certain questioning. The Hebrew word rendered "divine unto me" (ver. 8) is of Syriac origin, like most of those words describing illicit vaticinations. This miserable power, if it did exist, was one of the things the Israelites learned from the original inhabitants of Canaan. These "black arts" as they have been called, have in all ages, in every degree of civilization, always had an extraordinary fascination for men. It is well known that, even in our own "cultured age," similar pretensions are put forth, and the dead are still invoked, summoned, and questioned, as they were in the half-barbarous age when Saul and his companions, in their desperate strait, sought the witch of Endor.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* says: 'An old woman, a sorceress, still lingered at Endor; for where there is superstition it will find agents to turn it to profit. Seeking her, in deep disguise, by night, he begged she would invoke the spirit of Samuel, who had died shortly before. Conjurations and mutterings followed, to bring some apparent phantom before him whom she might pronounce to be Samuel, but both she and Saul were appalled by the result. What she could never, herself, have done, was divinely vouchsafed. An apparition suddenly rose before them, which Saul and the woman recognised at once, by its mantle, as Samuel. But it came with no words of comfort or hope.'

### Pouring out of Water.

**I SAMUEL vii. 6:** 'And they gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*As the pouring out of water is not a Mosaic rite, this must be regarded as an unauthorised and superstitious ceremony.*

**Explanation.**—The act has greatly puzzled Bible students, and many suggestions in connection with it have been made. The one that most commends itself is that the pouring of water was a symbolical act, very well understood by Eastern people. Writing on the customs of India, *Mr. Roberts* tells us, that 'pouring water on the ground is a very ancient way of confirming an oath in India.' There is reason to suppose that, in ancient times, almost every solemn act was accompanied by libations, or the outpouring of some fluid, generally wine, and we know that water was employed in the earlier times for this purpose. There may possibly be some reference to the compact into which the people now entered, and on which Samuel acted on their behalf; and the idea may be that their words

had gone forth not to be recalled. Oaths were certainly, under some such idea, confirmed anciently by libations. Thus Ulysses says of Phidon,

“ To me the monarch swore in his own hall,  
Pouring libation.”

*Mr. Roberts* gives the following anecdote from the Hindu mythology. ‘When the god Vishnu, in the disguise of a dwarf, requested the giant Maha Ville (Bali) to grant him one step of his kingdom, the favour was conceded, and *confirmed* by Maha Ville pouring out water before the dwarf. In that ancient work, the *Scanda Purana*, where the account is given of the marriage of the god Siva with Paravati, it is said of the father, He placed the hand of the goddess Paravati, genetrix of the world, in the hand of Parama Easuran (Siva), and, *pouring out the water*, said, “I give her to thee with all my heart.” This, therefore, was done in confirmation of the compact.

*Canon Spence* makes a suggestion which would be valuable if so simple an explanation as that given above were not at command. He says : ‘What more likely than that the prophet-statesman—who in that solemn juncture represented priest and judge and seer to Israel—devised on that momentous day new symbolic rites, signifying Israel’s new dedication to the Eternal for the future, Israel’s repentance for the sad past? The solemn pouring out of water before the Lord symbolized, to a people trained so carefully to watch the meaning and signification of symbols and imagery, the heart and whole inner life poured out before the Lord ; the fasting represented the repentant, humble sinner bowed down in grief before the one true God.’

Connected with a somewhat similar reference in 2 Sam. xiv. 14. to ‘water spilt on the ground,’ *Gadsby* relates that, ‘passing by one house, I heard wailings, and I narrowly escaped being drenched with water. My guide said a Jew was dead. I thought nothing of the circumstance until I read, a few days ago, in Jowett’s “Christian Researches,” that the Jews throw out of the window all the water that is in a house in which any person has died, believing that the soul had cleansed itself therein. The Armenians pour a glass of water on the head of a corpse when it is put into the grave.’

## Royal Bathing in the Nile.

EXODUS ii. 5 : 'And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river ; and her maidens walked along by the river side' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Do the Egyptian records give any illustrations of the practice that is here indicated, or was this a custom of this particular princess ?*

**Answer.**—No very full or accurate information on this subject seems to be at command, and indeed the matter is one concerning private and personal habits of which details are not likely to have been preserved. We can quite understand that in such a hot country as Egypt opportunities for bathing would be eagerly sought : but the privacy which Eastern women so anxiously preserved, makes it very unlikely that the open bathing of the Egyptian women in the river Nile was ever an established custom.

In two directions explanations of this incident have been sought. Some think that this princess was a childless wife, and as this condition is regarded as extremely distressing by all Eastern women, we must assume that she was exceedingly anxious to get her disability removed. A superstitious sentiment prevailed respecting the Nile, the waters of which were thought to be health-restoring and fructifying. The bathing of the princess, therefore, bore special relation to her condition, and the state of her mind and feelings made her so readily affected by the sight of the beautiful babe in the little ark. From this very reasonable point of view we may regard the bathing as unusual and temporary, and the attendance of the maidens, who are said to have 'walked along the river-side,' secured for the princess all necessary privacy.

Supporting this view, the *Speaker's Commentary* says : 'The Nile was worshipped as an emanation of Osiris, and a peculiar power of imparting life and fertility was attributed to its waters, a superstition still prevalent in the country.'

The other explanation of the incident is that the Nile, or one of its tributaries, flowed through, or by, the grounds of Pharaoh's palace, and that a portion was marked off for the bathing purposes of the court ladies. All needful privacy was thus secured, and we may assume that the princess was but following her daily custom. The difficulty of this explanation is, that the mother of Moses would not have access to the palace grounds. It is quite possible, however, that she placed the child where the current would be sure to carry the ark down among the reeds which screened the princess's bathing place.

Off the main stream of the Nile, the current would run very slowly, and the ark would be in no great peril.

There is a suggestion made by *Dr. C. Geikie* which supports the view we prefer, viz., that this was an occasional bathing, with a distinctly superstitious aim. He says that Rameses was at this time in residence at his northern capital, Tanis. The 'daughter of Pharaoh' must have been his sister; and it seems that he was married to her: and a marriage of brother and sister was thought in Egypt, as in ancient Persia, the best possible for a prince, to guarantee the purity of the Divine blood of the royal house. But such unnatural marriages are often unfruitful: and the force of the Scripture narrative almost wholly depends on the fact of the childlessness of this princess. The name given to her by Josephus, Thermouthis, 'Beloved by the goddess Mut,' is found as that of one of the wives of Rameses.

### Removing Bodies from Trees at Nightfall.

**JOSHUA x. 26, 27:** 'And afterward Joshua smote them, and put them to death, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass at the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had hidden themselves, and laid great stones on the mouth of the cave, unto this very day' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Was it for merciful or for sanitary reasons that the bodies were not allowed to remain exposed through the night?*

**Answer.**—The hanging mentioned in Scripture is what we should understand by 'gibbeting,' or the public exposure of the bodies of executed persons. Death by the breaking of the neck through a sudden drop from a scaffold, with a rope round the neck, is not referred to in Scripture. The condemned person was killed in some other way, and then, as a public declaration and warning, the body was hung up in the sight of the people.

There was a very strong sentiment established in the East against allowing dead bodies to remain long unburied. Loyalty to the memory of the dead found expression in speedy efforts for their interment; and no greater indignity could be put on a family than to refuse burial, or delay burial, in the case of any deceased member. This is illustrated, on its higher religious side, in the familiar classical drama of 'Antigone.'

The importance of the sentiment is at once recognised when we remember that all who came in contact with a dead person were regarded as ceremonially unclean. They would be anxious to secure restoration to ceremonial privileges as speedily as possible. Dead

bodies, in hot countries, begin at once to corrupt, and, unless at once removed, seriously imperil the health of the household in which they remain. And if left unprotected in the open air, the body would soon be devoured by carrion beasts and birds, a mode of disposing of it that has always been regarded as extremely humiliating and painful. An African traveller tells of the death of one of his party. The body was simply dragged away a hundred yards in front of the tent, carrion birds in large numbers pounced upon it, and within half an hour the flesh was gone, and nothing but clean whitened bones were left.

As a public triumph over these five kings, Joshua had them gibbeted, but there was no intention of offering insult, and Joshua met the common sentiment, mercifully arranging for a speedy interment, and securing the bodies from being torn of beast or bird. During the day the gibbets were watched, and carrion creatures driven off. But no protection could be given during the night; and, if left all the night, the condition of the bodies in the morning would be extremely repulsive; so Joshua saved everybody's feelings by arranging for the burial ere night fell.

Joshua only carried out the merciful requirements of the Mosaic law, as found in Deut. xxi. 22, 23.

*Winer* tells us that the hanging of a *living* man is a Persian punishment. Under the Herods this mode of execution occurs among the Jews also, as well as in Egypt during the Roman age.

## Jezebel's Scheme for the Destruction of Naboth.

1 KINGS xxi. 9, 10: 'And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.'

**Difficulty.**—*Jezebel evidently made a bad use of some recognised legal form, and this was a judicial murder; but none of our legal forms help us to understand precisely what this was.*

**Explanation.**—Our laws concerning 'blasphemy' greatly need to be reformed, but they preserve the ordinary judicial course, and do not yield the matters of conviction and execution to the mere excitement of the people. In Israel this one crime was dealt with by a sort of 'Lynch law'; the people at once vindicated the outraged honour of Jehovah, or of the king; as soon as the accusation was in any sense regarded as proved, the blasphemer was borne, in sudden tumult, outside the gates, and stoned to death. This crime, there-

fore, and this established custom, precisely suited the vile and shameful purpose of the unscrupulous Jezebel. No delay would occur ; no death-warrant was required ; no appeal was possible : make Naboth out to be a blasphemer, and the popular voice would at once clear him out of the way. This much may be said for the elders of Jezreel, that they may have supposed Jezebel had some good reason for making such an accusation, but could not secure precise evidence, and therefore the degraded Eastern custom of paying witnesses to swear falsely must be resorted to. Nothing, however, can relieve them from the terrible charge of playing against their consciences into the hands of a wicked woman.

The scheme was somewhat as follows : Jezebel intimated that a dreadful curse was hanging over Jezreel, because there was some great criminal in it, some great iniquity remained unavenged. A town's meeting was to be called to consider what could be done to avert the evil. At the meeting the elders were to take care that Naboth occupied a prominent position, well in sight of everyone. Suddenly an accusation was to be made against Naboth ; he was to be singled out as the guilty party, a tumult was to be raised, two men were to be brought forward as witnesses of his blasphemy, and then the people were to be left to work their will on him. It was, in a sense, a legal scheme, but it was of quite an exceptional character—a combination of the legal and the tumultuous. By accusing Naboth of the crime which we should call treason, Jezebel, according to custom, secured the reversion of his landed property to the king upon his death.

Some illustration of this case may be found in that of the martyr Stephen.

*Dr. C. Geikie* succinctly narrates Jezebel's scheme. 'If Ahab really wanted the vineyard, she would get it for him. Writing a letter in his name, and duly authenticated by the royal seal, to the elders and chief men of Samaria (there is a difference of opinion as to whether the trial took place at Jezreel or at Samaria), she commanded them to proclaim a fast, as at the occurrence of some great public calamity. High treason had been committed, and the wrath of the gods must be deprecated. Naboth was to be put at the head of the assembly, and when thus brought into prominent notice was to be accused as the criminal, by hired false witnesses, so common in all ages in the East. It was to be asserted that he had cursed God and the king. His only offence, of course, had been keeping his own property when Ahab wished him to sell it. Largely dependent on the court, and daunted by the fierce energy and unscrupulousness of Jezebel, the

elders had not spirit to resist, and carried out her murderous plan. Naboth, having been charged with the crime, was at once condemned, and forthwith hurried outside the town walls by night and stoned to death, his sons also sharing his fate (2 Kings ix. 26); for they, too, must be destroyed to secure the vineyard. To add iniquity to the murders, the mangled bodies were left unburied, the greatest insult that could be paid to the dead.'

### Tear-Bottles.

PSALM lvi. 8: 'Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle; are they not in Thy Book?'

**Question.**—*Is this poetical figure based upon any known Eastern custom, or is it merely a poetical license?*

**Answer.**—There is abundant proof that it was a familiar and even honoured custom thus to collect the tears of mourners. And it is not so surprising that this should be done when we call to mind that Eastern people are much more demonstrative than Westerns, and are accustomed to weep with a freedom which to us seems very surprising.

The Romans used to collect the tears of sorrowing friends who wept for the dead, and put them in sepulchral urns of earth or glass.

*Morier* tells of a singular practice and sentiment in Persia. 'In some of their mournful assemblies it is the custom for a priest to go about to each person at the height of his grief with a piece of cotton in his hand, with which he carefully collects the falling tears, and which he then squeezes into a bottle, preserving them with the greatest caution. Some Persians believe that in the agony of death, when all medicines have failed, a drop of tears so collected, put into the mouth of a dying man, has been known to revive him, and it is for such use they are collected.'

*Gadsby* says: 'Most of the Easterns shed tears much more copiously than the people of Europe. The Psalmist said rivers of waters ran down his eyes, and though the language is beautifully figurative, I have no doubt it was also literally true. I have myself seen Arabs shed tears like streams. The custom in old times, in some parts, was, when a person was ill or in great distress, for his friends to go to see him, and take with them a tear-bottle. Then, as the tears rolled down the cheeks of the sufferer, they were caught in these bottles, sealed up, and preserved as a memorial of the event. There are several of these bottles in the British Museum. Some of them

consist of two bottles joined together, so as to reach both eyes at once; and that no tears should be wasted they were made to fit just under the eyes.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* regards the sentence as a 'bold but expressive metaphor. As the traveller carefully preserves water, milk, or wine in leather bottles or bladders for a journey, so David trusts that God keeps in memory every tear which he sheds. They are precious as memorials of many a sorrowful pleading, many a prayer offered with streaming eyes.'

*Roberts* says that a Hindoo in distress, as he weeps, will say, 'Ah! Lord, take care of these tears; let them not run in vain.' 'Alas! my husband, why beat me? my tears are known to God.'

## The Foxes and the Firebrands.

JUDGES xv. 4, 5: 'And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between every two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and the standing corn, and also the oliveyards.'

**Difficulties.**—*One man surely could not catch and keep so many as three hundred fierce wild animals. And Samson's act seems to be a malicious practical joke, doing extensive injury for no good moral ends.*

**Explanation.**—It appears that the Hebrew word *Shualim* is used for both foxes and jackals. The fox prowls about alone; the jackals hunt in herds. Whichever animal is referred to, Samson must have set traps for them, and as it would be necessary to do his malicious act promptly, it is more reasonable to assume that, in some way, he entangled a whole herd of jackals. How he controlled the creatures while he tied the firebrand to their tails is quite beyond explanation. His object in getting so many was to scatter the fire widely abroad by the frightened rushing of the beasts, and to ensure that some at least of the firebrands should keep alight. By tying two tails together he made the creatures pull against each other, this way and that, and kept them from rushing right away.

Samson did but follow one of the bad and malicious customs of the East. To burn the crops of an Arab is to this day the deadliest of all injuries. An example of the wicked practice may be found in 2 Sam. xiv. 30. *Canon Farrar* says: 'It is in entire accordance with the custom of the East, and it finds curious confirmation from the story in Ovid's *Fasti*, that every year, at the Cerealia torches were tied to the tails of foxes, and they were let loose in the Roman circus to commemorate the incident that on one occasion a young man at

Carseoli, to punish a fox for depredations on his hen-coops, had wrapped it up in straw, and set it on fire, and that the creature had escaped into the cornfields, and burnt down the standing crops.'

*Kitto* says: 'Samson caught, probably by the help of others, no fewer than three hundred foxes—animals which to this day abound in the same region. These, at the time he had chosen, he tied tail to tail, fixing a slow firebrand, likely to be kindled into flame by the air in rapid motion, between each pair of tails. Being then let loose, the alarmed animals naturally sought shelter among the standing corn, and soon set it in a blaze in every direction.'

*Tristram* thinks the brands were attached at some distance from the tails of the animals; and jackals, being accustomed to run together, would not, unless very tightly fastened, pull in opposite directions, as foxes or dogs would.

*Van Lennep* has a good note. 'The plan of tying the tails of two jackals together was certainly a most effectual means of attaining the object, as anyone will testify who has ever seen the experiment tried. A single animal carrying a firebrand would soon extinguish it, while two would not only be impeded in their progress, but would find no hole sufficiently large to admit them both at once, and so would continue rushing wildly through the land, setting fire to the sheaves of wheat, and also to that still standing, together with the vineyards and olives. The Philistines, moreover, would find it impossible to seize the authors of this terrible mischief. These firebrands were doubtless pieces of the pitch-pine of the country, which, once lighted, are put out with difficulty.'

On the second difficulty it is necessary that we should firmly express our view that no adequate excuse can be offered for this wanton and malicious act. 'The adoption of these rough, coarse, and cruel expedients must be as little judged by a later and better standard as his thirst for the revenge of personal wrongs.'

Samson's character, conduct, and mission seem to us wholly beyond explanation, unless we can accept the view so eloquently presented by *Dean Stanley*, following *Ewald*. The subject is so interesting and important that we give the passages from both these great writers:—

'Conjoined with the immense power given by the faith that he was God's own, Samson possessed within himself a second gift, which it was not possible for others, or even for himself personally, to call forth at will, which might indeed be latent at that very time in the whole people, but displayed itself in him with a peculiar creative force; and it is only the combination of this with the former very

different power that gave to his career its distinctive splendour. It is not (as is said of Hannibal) a merely hereditary hate without scruple and without affection, that urges him against the enemies of his people; on the other hand, he overflows with inexhaustible joyousness in word and deed, lightheartedness under the heaviest disasters, and sportive wit that accompanies him even to the moment of his self-chosen tragic end. In a love not easily repulsed, he feels himself drawn even to the oppressors of his people, and advances frankly to meet them. And when, in his intercourse with them, the wrathful Deity within suddenly urges him to show himself the inviolable consecrated servant of Jahveh, and to let the insolent "uncircumcised" feel the irresistible might of his arm, even this he takes almost as a jest, as something forced upon him against his will, and the fruit of a love misunderstood and scorned. His activity against the foe is thus only called forth casually and without premeditation; it is rather a sort of teasing, a reiterated mark of mortifying humiliation; more a sign of what his strength could do in need and in earnest than of what it does. But in fact this seeming half-heartedness of his nature not only affords testimony to the disposition of his nation, at that time scarcely capable of hatred, but in default of something better, was really the best for those unhappy times. For if a nation, in the main well disposed and civilized, has long to endure such grievous wrong from a haughty foe, it is a great gain if it loses not its buoyant mood, but while nothing better is possible, prepares itself for better times, at least by the lighter exercises of wit and playful fancy, or by occasional dashing strokes, and sometimes by the successful parry of attack and unexpected flashes, bursting out here and there, of suppressed military ardour. It is only by realizing vividly the whole weight of long-continued foreign rule which then pressed upon the people that we can understand the full value in such times, of those inalienable weapons, playful wit and jest; and again, in the proper place, of daring revolt against local injustice, or the heroism of individual self-sacrifice. We feel that a nation which even under misfortune overflowed with such health and vivacity, might soon again pass from these preparatory sports and skirmishes to contests of a happier character.'—*Ewald*.

'Samson's name, which Josephus interprets in the sense of "strong," was still more characteristic. He was "the Sunny," the bright and beaming, though wayward, likeness of the great luminary which the Hebrews delighted to compare to a "giant rejoicing to run his course, a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber." Nothing can disturb his radiant good-humour. His most valiant, his most

cruel actions, are done with a smile on his face and a jest in his mouth. It relieves his character from the sternness of Phœnician fanaticism. As a peal of hearty laughter breaks in upon the despondency of individual sorrow, so the joviality of Samson becomes a pledge of the revival of the greatness of his nation. It is brought out in the strongest contrast with the brute coarseness and stupidity of his Philistine enemies, here, as throughout the Sacred History, the butt of Israelitish wit and Israelitish craft.'—*Stanley*.

## Marriage Dowries.

**I SAMUEL xviii. 21-27:** 'David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed? . . . . And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry.'

**Question.**—*What Eastern custom can be referred to here? In Western lands the marriage dowry is associated only with the bride.*

**Answer.**—In many parts of the East both the parties in a treaty of marriage are expected to provide dowries. But this seems to have been a relic of the older notion that a bride was to be *purchased* from her relatives.

*Kitto* very skilfully explains the transaction brought before us in these verses. 'We all know that in the East the husband is expected in some sort to *purchase* his bride, by a payment to her father. One who cannot pay this in money may do it by his services, as Jacob did, or by some exploit fixed by the father, as Othniel did. David had a clear claim to one of Saul's daughters; but this, as a matter of right, he did not urge; and his family was not in such circumstances as to afford such "gift and dowry" as a king had a right to expect when he bestowed a daughter. To meet this difficulty, the king was graciously content to accept some great exploit against the public enemy as a sufficient equivalent for his daughter's hand. Thus understood, what Saul required was not, as the difference of manners has led many to suppose it to be, a gratuitous task, the real object of which might have been even at the first view, very obvious; but it was in appearance a generous and considerate mode of enabling the son of Jesse to contract this match on somewhat equal terms, by the acceptance of a service that he could render in lieu of payments beyond his power. For Saul to give his daughter without any consideration, would have been a slur upon her, and to accept her on such terms would have been, according to Eastern notions, dishonourable in David. It was, therefore, not without the appearance of generosity on the part of the king that he offered to accept a public

service in lieu of a private benefit; and it was right that he should make that service bear some proportion, in hazard and difficulty, to the value he set upon his daughter.'

*Dr. Turner*, writing on Polynesian customs, says: 'David objected to the proposal of being Saul's son-in-law on the ground of poverty. A Samoan would raise the same objection in the case of inequality in rank, owing to the difficulty he might have in getting up a dowry equal to that of the woman. The husband has to provide a dowry as well as the wife, and the dowry of each must be pretty nearly of equal value.'

*Van Lennep* tells us that, in the rural districts, among the village farmers and the nomad tribes, whose manners have been least affected by the influence of civilization, the marriage-contract is avowedly an act of purchase, the parents selling the daughter, whom they regard as their property, and whose acquiescence is secured by a few additional trifling gifts or trinkets. This is practised by all the Circassian tribes, both Muslim and pagan, among whom the father sells his daughter, and the brother his sister, to the highest bidder.'

## The Burnt-Offering of a King's Son.

**2 KINGS iii. 27:** 'Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall. And there was great wrath against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*This offering appears to have effected the deliverance of Moab in a strange way. Was the indignation excited by it against Israel reasonable?*

**Explanation.**—So far as we can understand the narrative, we see that Mesha, King of Moab, was at one time tributary to Ahab. Then he broke away from his engagements, and for a time asserted and maintained his independence. Jehoram, the son of Ahab, made a league with Jehoshaphat of Judah, and with the King of Edom, and the three united in an expedition for the recovery and subjection of Moab. They carried on the war with extreme and unreasonable violence, driving the Moabites to such extremities as to excite the intensest feeling against them. Mesha was beaten in battle, and as the conquerors advanced into his country they covered the fields with stones to render them barren, and filled up the wells to render the land uninhabitable. Mesha subsequently, in utter extremity, took refuge in a stronghold, probably Kir-haraseth, and there offered his son as a burnt-offering on the ramparts, in the sight of the

besiegers. The Moabites were evidently foaming with rage and indignation against their enemies who had driven them to such terrible shifts.

The retirement of the Israelites when this son was sacrificed was due to an Eastern superstitious notion, that the enemy would be haunted and cursed by the ghost of a person sacrificed under such circumstances. Nothing but a superstitious sentiment could have prevented their following up their advantages. Some, however, think that the fact of their having forced Mesha to such a dreadful deed, awakened the conscience of the Israelites to the wickedness of the way in which they had carried on the war, and made them fear the anger of Jehovah.

*Burder* says: 'The reason why the King of Moab offered his son *on the wall* was to represent to the attacking armies to what straits they had reduced him. He did not merely implore assistance from his gods by the sacrifice of his son, but took this method of terrifying his adversaries, after his own personal valour had proved ineffectual to deliver himself and his country. Cæsar says of the Gauls, that when they were afflicted with grievous diseases, or in time of war or great danger, they either offered men for sacrifices or vowed they would offer them. For they imagined God would not be appeased unless the life of a man were rendered for the life of a man.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* says: 'The awful tragedy, indeed, accomplished its end, but by a means Mesha could not have foreseen, and with which Chemosh had nothing to do. The sight filled the besieging army with horror. Such sacrifices, in the opinion of the Hebrews, polluted a land, and laid it under a curse of blood. They would no longer stay in it, but would rather give up all they had won. To remain might bring on them the wrath which must speedily break forth for a deed so appalling.'

The superstitious sentiment referred to above is illustrated by an Indian story, related by Lord Teignmouth. There were two Brahmins, named Beechuk and Adher, brothers, who had a quarrel with a man named Gowry. The emissaries of the latter stole forty rupees, the property of the two brothers, from the apartments of their women. When Beechuk understood what had happened, he took his mother to the bank of the rivulet which ran through the village, and there was also met by Adher, his brother. This was in the grey of the morning, and they called aloud to the people of the village that the forty rupees must be returned. No answer being given, Beechuk drew his scimitar, and deliberately struck off his mother's head. This was done that the mother's spirit, excited by

the beating of a large drum during forty days, might ever haunt, torment, and pursue to death Gowry and his associates. The last words the mother uttered were, 'I will blast Gowry and those concerned with him.'

## The Foot upon the Neck.

JOSHUA x. 24, 25: 'Joshua called for the men of Israel, and said unto the chiefs of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them.'

**Question.**—*Was this act of humiliation a special device of Joshua's, or was it based on some familiar ancient custom?*

**Answer.**—The act is not one which accords with Western notions of offering homage to kings, but Eastern peoples bow themselves down, with their faces to the ground; and to lay hold of the feet, or to kiss the feet, is the familiar expression of humiliation, penitence, and desire for mercy. When a suppliant takes such an attitude, it is a very simple thing for the person of whom he asks mercy to place his foot upon his neck, and this act was the recognised sign of the conquest, humiliation, and subjection of the persons so treated. It may be compared with the Western custom of surrendering the sword as an acknowledgment of being conquered.

Some variations of the figure will be found, as it is used in Gen. xlix. 8; 2 Sam. xxii. 41; Isai. xviii. 2, 7. As a symbol of complete subjugation it is found in Psalm cx. 1; 1 Cor. xv. 25.

The practice was a common one in the Byzantine empire. *Gibbon* says: 'We are told that Valerian in chains, but invested with the imperial purple, was exposed to the multitude, a constant spectacle of fallen greatness; and that whenever the Persian monarch (Sapor) mounted on horseback, he placed his foot on the neck of a Roman emperor.'

*Roberts*, illustrating Eastern customs from Hindoo life, says: 'This in the East is a favourite way of triumphing over a fallen foe. In the history of the battles of the gods, or giants, particular mention is made of the closing scene, how the conquerors went and trampled on their enemies. When people are disputing, should one be a little pressed, and the other begin to triumph, the former will say, "I will tread upon thy neck, and afterwards beat thee." A low caste man insulting one who is high, is sure to hear some one say to the offended individual, "Put your feet on his neck."'

It is not difficult to recognise the significance of the figure. The

sign of pride, and self-confidence, and triumphant success was the *stiff-neck*. Stiffening the neck and hardening the heart are closely associated, see 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13. Men are said to harden their neck, so that they might not hear (Neh. ix. 29). Proud ladies walk with stretched forth necks (Isai. iii. 16). And the self-willed, rebellious Israelites are a 'stiff-necked generation.' Straightening or stiffening the neck is the characteristic attitude and action of the self-reliant man; and therefore the most effective expression of the crushing down of pride is this placing of the foot upon the neck.

### Jewish Resistance upon Ahasuerus's Decree.

ESTHER ix. 5: 'And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them that hated them.'

**Difficulty.**—*Surely such a liberty, given to a dependent and captive race, must have put in grave peril the national order and government.*

**Explanation.**—It is not possible for us to conceive how such an order or permission could be given with safety. Society would never be safe, if the government loosened its hand, and gave liberty to its dependent subjects, its slaves, helots, or criminal classes. But it is well for us to distinguish between the order, as given from the palace, and the order, as translated by the Jewish people, and as actually worked out under force of circumstances. The order was strictly a permission to the Jews to defend themselves, 'to stand for their lives,' whenever attempts were made to execute the decree which Haman had secured. But this involved permission to *organize* for defence. It excused efforts to crush attacks which were being prepared for, before they were made; and this could hardly be distinguished from attack. It was indeed a ridiculous order, necessitated only by the ridiculous sentiment that the 'laws of the Medes and Persians could not be changed.' To what extent the governors of the provinces concerned restrained the Jews we are not told, but the result was such a slaughter as was only possible in Eastern lands. We can only compare the scene with the rising of the Greek helots and Roman slaves.

'How far the Jews acted according to the strict letter of the edict, and "stood for their lives" only when attacked, is perhaps to be doubted. They had on their side all the executive of the empire (ver. 3), and evidently, to all intents and purposes, the second edict was considered virtually to repeal the first. The Jews, therefore, being in favour at court, and, as was not unnatural after their alarm,

being now full of indignation and vengeance, were probably resolved to use their opportunities while they had the chance. If so, who could object, so long as they did nothing against the authorities? and they were on their side. That they did make a bloody use of their opportunity is shown clearly by verse 16.'—*Ellicott's Commentary*.

*Bishop Wordsworth* makes a great effort to relieve the condemnation which we at once pronounce on the vindictive spirit and ruthless slaughter of these Jews. He says: 'The slaughter, therefore, of these 75,000, shows that a very large number of their heathen enemies, who had been exasperated and stimulated against the Jews by the decree of Haman, issued nearly a year before, had prepared themselves for an attack upon them; and that, presuming upon their own overwhelming numbers and forces, as compared with the paucity and weakness of the Jews, they assaulted them in order to destroy and despoil them, and to enrich themselves with their property; and that the Jews made a vigorous resistance, and, by the help of God, routed their assailants with a great discomfiture. The slaughter was not a consequence of a vindictive spirit in the Jews, but of the bitter animosity of their enemies; and it proves that the Jews *would* have been extinguished (as Haman's decree intended that they should be), if God had not interfered to rescue them from destruction.'

## Divining by the Ephod.

**I SAMUEL xxiii. 9:** 'And David knew that Saul devised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.' (See pages 60, 189.)

**Question.**—*Was divining by the ephod a proper and recognised mode of inquiring from God?*

**Answer.**—This incident occurred at Keilah, and under circumstances which quite prevented David from applying at the Tabernacle for counsel. We are told, in verse 6, that from the slaughter of the priests at Nob, Abiathar succeeded in escaping, and in his escape he secured *an ephod*. To be of any service as an oracle, this must have been *the* ephod specially worn by the high priest. It is significant that Saul's violence at Nob deprived him of the possibility of inquiring of God in the ordinary method, through the high priest, and Divine Providence gave that special advantage to his rival, David.

It seems that inquiries of God might be made in two ways—either

through the prophets, who would speak in words the Divine answer that was given to them ; or through the priests, who could only use the medium of the Urim and Thummim, and appear not to have secured more than some sign of approval or disapproval. It seems that in the high priestly ephod, or *shoulder-piece*, 'were set twelve precious stones, one for each of the twelve tribes. The names of the tribes were engraved on these gems, the Rabbis tell us, along with some other sacred words. On important, solemn occasions—it seems perfectly certain during a considerable time—these stones were allowed, by the providence of God, who worked so many marvels for His people, to be used as oracles. Probably the use of the sacred gems was restricted to the high priest, who could only call out the supernatural power at the bidding of the king, or the head of the State for the time being.'

In what way the ephod stones gave their response we cannot certainly know. Some think there was a peculiar flashing or shining. Others say that, as each gem represented a tribe, by the illumination of certain gems a word could readily be formed. Josephus says the sardonyxes were bright before a victory or when a sacrifice was acceptable ; dark when any disaster was impending.

It may, however, be reasonably urged that the ephod which Abiathar secured was not this special high priestly garment, with its sacred fittings, but an ordinary priestly ephod ; and that the Divine response to Abiathar, when clothed in this ephod, was a graciously exceptional case. The possession by David of the Urim and Thummim would surely have been for Saul a fair *casus belli*.

We probably need freer ideas of the use of the ephod, and some accurate acquaintance with the sentiments that prevailed in relation to it. Gideon made an ephod (Judges viii. 27), which was a sleeveless coat, specially worn by a person of whom an oracle was sought. When Micah set up his independent worship, we find that an ephod was regarded as one of the essential things (Judges xvii. 5). Samuel wore an ephod, and so did David on one occasion. Possibly the use of this particular vestment was popularly regarded as constituting the wearer, for the time being, a sort of mediator between God and man.

The *Speaker's Commentary*, with some firmness, asserts that 'there is not here a vestige of the Jewish notion that the answers were given by the shining out of the stones in the breastplate of the ephod. The answers were evidently given by the Word of the Lord in the mouth of Abiathar.'

## Holding the Horns of the Altar.

1 KINGS i. 50, 51: 'And Adonijah feared because of Solomon; and he arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold Adonijah feareth King Solomon: for, lo, he hath laid hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let King Solomon swear unto me to-day that he will not slay his servant with the sword.'

**Question.**—*Was this a special device of Adonijah's, or does it indicate a prevailing custom and sentiment?*

**Answer.**—Laying hold of the horns of the altar was one of the recognised modes of claiming sanctuary, or protection from the consequences of misdeeds. But it should be clearly understood that in ancient times 'sanctuary' could be no protection for wilful and determined criminals. It only shielded those who had done some wrong under pressure of haste, or inadvertently, or by accident. The principle of all 'sanctuaries' is illustrated in the provision of the cities of refuge, which could not shield wilful murderers—only those who had killed their neighbours by accident, without hating them beforehand. It was quite a degradation of the idea of 'sanctuaries' when, in the middle ages, villains and criminals were shielded from the proper punishment of their crimes.

The altar referred to is probably the 'altar of burnt-offering which had been erected on Mount Zion, where Abiathar, one of his partisans, presided as high priest. The horns or projections at the four corners of the altar, to which the sacrifices were bound, and which were tipped with the blood of the victim, were symbols of grace and salvation to the sinner. Hence the altar was regarded as a sanctuary' (Exod. xxi. 13, 14). 'Taking sanctuary at the altar was no part of the law, but a custom prior to the law, and common to the Jews with many other nations.'

The prevalence of the idea of sanctuaries may be illustrated from *Dr. Turner's* work on 'Polynesia.' 'In Samoa, the manslayer, or the deliberate murderer, flies to the *house* of the chief of the village, or to the house of the chief of another village to whom he is related by the father's or the mother's side. In nine cases out of ten he is perfectly safe if he only remains there. In such instances the chief delights in the opportunity of showing his importance. In Samoa, a chief's house is literally his fortification, except in times of open rebellion and actual war.'

It has been wisely remarked that 'however merciful the original institution of sanctuaries might be, in modern times it was much abused, so that places intended to protect the innocent became the

resort and refuge of the guilty. Many examples curiously illustrative of this observation might be adduced, though for the most part they are only to be found recorded in the scattered pages of publications difficult of access to the common reader. "The right of sanctuary," says a modern writer on the annals and antiquities of London, "was enjoyed by various districts and buildings in London. In times when every man went armed—when feuds were of hourly occurrence in the streets—when the age had not yet learned the true superiority of right over might, and when private revenge too often usurped the functions of justice, it was essential that there should be places whither the homicide might flee and find refuge and protection until the violence of angry passions had subsided, and there was a chance of a fair trial.'

### Supposed Virtue in Elisha's Staff.

2 KINGS iv. 31: 'And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.'

**Difficulty.**—*Elisha's act in sending this staff was calculated to encourage false and superstitious notions.*

**Explanation.**—When superstitious notions are commonly entertained, the servant of God may often effectively correct them by acting in accordance with them, and so showing how unworthy and without due foundation they are. It is said that necromancers were accustomed to send their staff or rod to those whom they would restore from sickness or devil-possession, with orders to the messengers to let the staff come in contact with nothing by the way that might dissipate or destroy the virtue imparted to it. It is suggested that the manifest failure of Elisha's staff to accomplish anything was designed to free the Shunamite, and the people of Israel at large, from the superstitious notion of supposing a miraculous virtue resided in any *person* or in any *rod*. Loyal prophets of Jehovah had always to guard against the disposition of the people to trust in *them*, and rely on *their endowments*, rather than in God, whose messages they brought, and whose works of healing and grace they wrought. This Shunamite thought Elisha could raise her son, so she must be taught the lesson that Elisha could not, but God could.

Keil takes this view, and thinks 'the prophet foresaw the failure of his experiment, and intended by it to teach that the power of working miracles was not magically inherent in himself or in his staff, as they might imagine, but only in Jehovah, who granted the temporary use

of that power to faith and prayer. In other words, Elisha was seeking to lift the minds of his disciples to higher and more spiritual conceptions of the prophetic office.'

*Bähr* thinks 'that Elisha was at fault in supposing he could transfer the spirit and power of a prophet to his servant, and acted in overhaste, without a Divine incentive.'

It is curious to find a staff, or walking-stick (the word used does not mean 'magician's rod'), the characteristic symbol of Elisha, and not the *mantle* which fell to him from the ascending Elijah.

*Dr. Turner*, in his account of Polynesian customs, gives a suggestive illustration of this passage, which he fell in with during a visit to the New Hebrides. 'Among some stone idols and other relics of heathenism which I had handed to me, was an old smooth *staff* made of ironwood, a little longer and thicker than an ordinary walking-stick. It had been kept for ages in the family of one of the disease-healing craft, was considered as the representative of the god, and was taken regularly by the priest when he was sent for to visit a case of sickness. The eyes of the poor patient brightened up at the sight of the stick. All that the priest did was merely to sit before the sick man, and, leaning on this sacred staff, to speechify a little, and tell him there was no further fear, and that he might expect soon to recover.'

*Kitto* thinks Elisha sent his staff by his servant with the expectation that it would be effectual to raise from the dead; and this showed his great faith. He did **not** at first intend to go to Shunem, and for that reason sent his staff to supply the lack of his own presence. If he had then intended to go himself, there would have been no need for sending his staff beforehand; and his haste to do so might afford an opportunity to the ungodly of throwing disparagement on the miracle, by saying that he did this because he apprehended the child would be 'too dead,' before he came himself, to be revived at all.

It may, however, have been the intention of Elisha, in sending the staff, to arrest the swiftly hurrying corruption of summer-time in that hot country.

### Lapping and Bowing.

JUDGES vii. 5: 'Everyone that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise everyone that boweth down upon his knees to drink.'

**Question.**—*How could this mere peculiarity in the method and habit of drinking come to be a satisfactory test of character?*

**Answer.**—It is important, first, to see what particular qualities were necessary in the men who were to take part in the proposed

stratagem. The most important quality was *self-restraint*. The plan Gideon had been led to form could only be carried out by men who would do precisely as they were told, would keep silence, make no sign, yet be thoroughly on the alert, and would act, at the appointed moment, with promptitude and decision. Such men only as could control themselves would be safe to trust in such an exciting time, when the plan might be wholly spoiled by the indiscretion of one man.

*Ewald* points out the significance of the test : 'Those only are the true warriors of Jahveh, who, when an enjoyment is offered—as, for instance, refreshment at a living well—taste it only in passing, and while standing on the alert ; not seeking enjoyment, and crouching down to it in indolent comfort, but, mindful every minute of the business in hand, and the desired victory, only lapping the water like dogs upon their way.'

*Stanley*, after saying that the 'cowards had been removed from the army,' adds : 'The next step was to remove the rash. At the brink of the spring, those who rushed headlong down to quench their thirst, throwing themselves on the ground, or plunging their mouths into the water, were rejected ; those who took up the water in their hands, and lapped it with self-restraint, were chosen.'

It is not easy to decide precisely what is meant by *lapping*, as, to our Western minds, it is more appropriately applied to those who bent down and put their mouths close to the water. But it has been pointed out that man does not properly *lap*, nor can he lap, and therefore the term must be used in a figurative sense. To know the Eastern customs in such a matter we must consult travellers to, and residents in, Eastern lands, and be guided by their observations.

*Kitto* has a very careful and suggestive note : 'The explanation which we give is founded upon our own observation of the different modes in which men drink in haste when coming to a stream on a journey, without being provided with vessels wherewith to raise the water to their mouths. It is to be observed that this class is further described as "the number of those that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth." The chief distinction between them and the others is, that they did not bow down on their knees to bring their mouths near the water, and luxuriate in a more leisurely draught. They continued standing, stooping so far only as to be able to reach the water with their hands, the hollow of which they filled, and then brought it rapidly to the mouth, jerking in the refreshing contents. The motion, compared to a dog's lapping, cannot apply to the tongue, first, because the human tongue is not framed for lapping ; and, secondly,

because, if so, it would be an action belonging rather to those who brought their faces down to the water, than to those who stood upon their feet. Supposing lapping with the tongue at all a possible action to a man, it would certainly not be resorted to by one who had succeeded in bringing a handful of water so far as his mouth. It would have been a needless, if not silly, delay in quenching his thirst. The motion expressed by "lapping" must therefore apply to the hand, the rapid motion of which between the water and the mouth might be not inaptly compared to the rapid projection and retraction of a dog's tongue in lapping. This last action, if taken, as is apparently meant, for an indication of character, would denote men of rapid and impulsive action, too earnest in the work before them to endure to satisfy their animal wants with the leisurely action of men at ease: a few hasty handfuls of water were all that the impatience of their spirit, in the great interests before them, allowed them to take. These were the men to save Israel.'

Travellers on the Continent, who undertake long days of walking, know how the guides warn them against frequent and much drinking of water on the way. Ready yielding to the thirsty feeling nourishes it into strength. Restraint best masters the craving.

*Dr. Turner*, writing of Polynesian customs, says that a thirsty Samoan, in coming to a stream of water, stoops down, rests the palm of his left hand on his knee, and with the right hand throws the water up so quickly as to form a continual jet from the stream to his mouth, and there he laps until he is satisfied.

*Jamieson* tells us that the wandering people in Asia, when on a journey or in haste they come to water, do not stoop down with deliberation on their knees, but only bend forwards as much as is necessary to bring their hand in contact with the stream, and throw it up with rapidity, and at the same time such address that they do not drop a particle.

The Jewish explanations of this test are both interesting and curious, though we cannot but regard them as strained and unnatural. *Josephus* says that Gideon led them down to the spring in the fiercest heat of the noon-day, and that he judged those to be the bravest who flung themselves down and drank, and those to be the cowards who lapped the water hastily and tumultuously. Some even go so far as to suggest that the Divine aid was shown by the fact that the greatest cowards were chosen. *Raschi* gives the Jewish interpretation thus: 'Gideon can ascertain the religious antecedents of his men from the way in which they prepare to drink. Idolaters were accustomed to pray kneeling before their idols. On this account kneeling,

even as a mere bodily posture, had become unpopular and ominous in Israel, and was avoided as much as possible. Hence, he who, in order to drink, throws himself on his knees, shows thereby, in a perfectly free and natural manner, that this posture is nothing unusual to him; whereas those who have never been accustomed to kneel, feel no need of doing it now, and as naturally refrain from it. It would have been difficult for Gideon to have ascertained, in any other way, what had been the attitude of his men towards idolatry. While quenching their eager thirst, all deliberation being forgotten, they freely and unrestrainedly indicate to what posture they were habituated. It is a principle pervading the legendary lore of all nations, that who and what a person is can only be ascertained by observing him when under no constraint of any kind. The queen of a northern legend exchanges dresses with her maid, but she who is not the queen is recognised by her drinking. That which is here in Scripture accepted with reference to religious life and its recognitions, popular literature applies to the keen, discriminating observance of social life.'

### Limitation of the Rights of the Blood-Avenger.

JOSHUA xx. 6: 'And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days; then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.'

**Question.**—*Do we rightly see in this an instance of the Mosaic legislation preserving old customs, but mitigating their undue severity?*

**Answer.**—*Lange* says: 'We find vengeance for blood not only among the Hebrews, Arabs, Persians, but also among the Greeks, with the Germanic and Slavic peoples, in the infancy of their development, as now among savage nations.' In such cases the custom prevails in all its sternness, and without qualifications. The offender is pursued relentlessly, until vengeance can be wrought, and the guilt of blood can be wiped out.

We understand the procedure to have been as follows. Before Moses' time the family avenger dealt with all cases in which life was taken violently, recognising no distinction between murder and manslaughter, and allowing no mitigations of penalty. Moses arranged for the security of the manslayer, until, calmly and judicially, his act could be estimated, and it could be decided whether he had killed by accident or upon premeditation. To secure this unprejudiced examination, the man was sheltered in the city of refuge. If it was decided that he had killed intentionally, the murderer was

delivered into the hands of the blood-avenger, who executed natural justice upon him. If it was decided that he had killed accidentally, he was preserved from the blood-avenger, but treated as a careless, dangerous person, and compelled strictly to remain within the precincts of the city of refuge. But the light of hope was not shut out from the man. He was not enslaved for life. Perhaps no sentence ever passed by man upon his fellow-man ought to blot out hope utterly. And the limitation of this man's sentence was so specially gracious because it was uncertain. The high priest might die any year ; and each new year the poor man might renew his hope, for the priest might die that year. *Keil* says that 'the death of the earthly high priest became a type of that of the heavenly one.'

The Rev. H. C. Waller, M.A., in *Ellicott's Commentary*, has an admirable note on making the retention of the sin-stricken man dependent on the life of the high priest. 'If the manslayer did not intend to shed the blood of his neighbour, he is not worthy of death, and the Divine mercy provides a shelter wherein he may still live without offence to the Divine majesty. Such a shelter is the city of refuge, a city of priests or Levites, whose office was to *bear the iniquity of the children of Israel*, to shield their brethren from the danger they incurred by the dwelling of Jehovah in the midst of them, "dwelling among them in the midst of their uncleanness." Hence the manslayer must always remain, as it were, under the shadow of the sin-bearing priest or Levite, that he might live, and not die for the innocent blood which he had unintentionally shed. But how could the death of the high priest set him free? Because the high priest was the representative of the whole nation. What the Levites were to all Israel ; what the priests were to the Levites ; that the high priest was to the priests, and through them to the nation—the individual sin-bearer for all. Into his hands came year by year "all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins," and he presented a *sin-offering* for all. While the high priest still lived he would still be *legally* tainted (burdened) with this load of sin, *for the law provides no forgiveness for a priest*. But "he that is dead is justified from *sin*," and at his death the load which was laid on the high priest might be held to have passed from him, for he had paid the last debt a man can pay on earth. But the high priest being justified, the sinners whom he represents are justified also, and therefore the manslayers go free.'

On the intense severity of the custom of blood-avenging, *Dean Stanley* writes thus : 'Of all the virtues of civilization, the one which most incontestably follows in its train, and is most rarely anticipated

in earlier ages, is humanity. And rare as this is everywhere in barbarous nations, it is rarest in the East. In the East and West the value of animal and of human life is exactly reversed. An Arab, who will be shocked at the notion of shooting his horse, will have no scruple in killing a man. And what was the fierceness of the ancient Semitic race, especially, is apparent both from the later Jewish history, and from that of the kindred nations of Phœnicia and Carthage. Against this the laws of Moses, in war, in slavery, and in the social relations of life, stand out, as has often been observed, in marvellous contrast. But there was one form of ferocity, then as now, peculiar to the Bedouin tribes, that of revenge for blood. To the fourth generation (it is the exact limit laid down both in the Bedouin custom and in the Mosaic law), the lineal descendant of a murdered man is to this day charged with the duty of avenging his blood. This institution, so deeply seated in the Arab race as to have defied the course of centuries, and the efforts of three religions, was assumed and tolerated, like slavery, polygamy, or any other of the ancient Asiatic usages, which more or less lasted through the Jewish times. But it was restrained by the establishment of the cities of refuge. If, for the hardness of the Bedouin heart, Moses left the avengers of blood as he found them, yet, for the tenderness of heart infused by a "more excellent way," he reared those barriers against them. The common law of the desert found itself kept in check by the statute law of Palestine, and the six cities became (as far as we know from history) rather monuments of what had been, and of what might have been, than remedies of what was.'

### Streets in Strange Cities.

1 KINGS xx. 34: 'Thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria.'

**Question.**—*What Eastern custom is illustrated by this strange covenant?*

**Answer.**—The word translated 'streets' probably means 'open spaces' or 'squares,' and they suggest conveniences for carrying on trade. The answering term, for Western life, would be 'shops' or 'markets.' Granting this permission to Israel was really giving free openings in Damascus to Israelite commerce. Commercial advantages, rather than any other, were probably sought by this arrangement; which may be compared with the modern Oriental practice of maintaining 'Jews' quarters' and 'Christians' quarters' in all cities of any considerable size. It should also be remembered that race

jealousies and animosities are so intense in the East, that each race resident in a town is wisely located in its own distinct district; and, probably, the permission of Benhadad secured to the Jews, in this quarter of Damascus, the free exercise of their own religion and laws.

*Dr. Barry* says: 'This concession implies a virtual acknowledgment of supremacy; for the right to have certain quarters for residence, for trade, perhaps even for garrison, in the capital of a king, belongs only to one who has sovereignty over him.'

Probably, at a former period, when Benhadad's father had conquered Israel, he had settled a sort of colony of Syrians in the capital of the conquered country; and those colonists dwelt in streets, either expressly built for them, or from which Israelitish inhabitants had been expelled in order to make room for them. Now, Benhadad, in turn being subdued, agrees that Ahab shall either build or seize certain streets in the Syrian capital, to be occupied by Israelites. The transaction receives a good illustration in the history of Constantinople. When that city had been besieged by Bajazet, the Turkish Sultan, for about two years, at the end of the fourteenth century, Emmanuel, the Greek Emperor, sent out ambassadors to the Grand Turk to sue for peace. At length a treaty was concluded, and peace restored, on the condition, among others, that the Turks should have liberty to dwell in one street, with free exercise of their own religion and laws, and under a judge of their own nation. This was agreed to, and a large number of Turks forthwith took up their residence at the capital.

### Uzziah's Incense-Burning.

2 CHRONICLES xxvi. 16: 'But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.' *The Rev. Ver.* reads: 'lifted up so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against the Lord his God.'

**Question.**—*Can we get at Uzziah's idea and intention in thus persisting in performing himself the duty of the priests?*

**Answer.**—It is probable that Uzziah was greatly interested in what we may call religious archæology; in ancient rites, utensils, altars, decorations, services, etc. Finding that David and Solomon had actually officiated as priests, he was disposed to restore the practice. Azariah, the high priest, was evidently anxiously watching this tendency in the king, the more anxiously because at this time the priests were earnestly seeking to restore their paramount influence

with the people; so when the peculiar privileges of his order were touched, he showed the utmost vigour in his resistance. There was a good deal of party spirit at this time. A king's party and a priest's party had come into conflict, and each was trying to master the other.

It is doubtful whether, in view of precedents, Uzziah's proposed act was a wrong one; but it is quite clear that the *spirit* of his act was so entirely different from the spirit of David or Solomon, that what might otherwise have been permitted, under the circumstances became a sacrilegious act; and this God recognised by permitting a divine judgment to fall upon the king.

Some writers seriously question whether the precedents of David and Solomon can be appealed to, because, though it is quite true that they took a very leading part in certain great state and religious ceremonials, it is by no means certain that they actually themselves performed any of the distinctly priestly functions, and the offer of incense on the golden altar was quite an exclusive priestly duty.

*Dr. C. Geikie* thinks 'the reformation under Jehoiada, and the long pupilage of Jehoash, had consolidated the power of the priests, and enabled them to claim an exclusive right to perform the sacred offices. Uzziah, however, we are told, did not acknowledge this recent innovation, and having put on priestly robes on a day of high festival, entered the holy place to offer incense on the golden altar. For the first time, however, in the history of the monarchy, the royal assumption of such duties was resented as a sacrilege.'

*Dr. A. Phelps* regards 'the case of Uzziah as one of the few instances recorded in the Scriptures of instant and severe punishment of the sin of irreverence and presumption.'

*Dean Stanley* says: 'Whether it was that, in the changes that had elapsed since the reign of Solomon, the custom had dropped, or whether Uzziah entered upon it in a haughty and irritating spirit, or whether the priestly order, since their accession of power through the influence of Jehoiada, claimed more than their predecessors had claimed in former times, it is said that the high priest Azariah, with eighty colleagues, positively forbade the king's entrance, on the ground that this was a privilege peculiar to the priestly office.'

In estimating the act of Uzziah, it should be remembered that the offering of the daily incense involved going within the Holy Place, and the office was regarded as so honourable that no one was allowed to perform it twice, 'since it brought the offering priest

nearer the Divine Presence in the Holy of Holies than any other priestly act, and carried with it the richest blessing from on high, which all ought to have a chance of thus obtaining. Like the rest of the sacred functions, it was determined by lot.'

### Sowing Cities with Salt.

JUDGES ix. 45: 'And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.'

**Question.**—*Was this a symbolical action, or was it intended to do the district a permanent and irreparable injury?*

**Answer.**—Serious damage might be done, but no irreparable injury could follow sowing lands with salt, whose power would gradually become exhausted, as does the power of manures. Some lands need an addition of salt to complete their proper chemical constituents, and it is quite usual for farmers to cast a judiciously limited quantity over their lands. Where this is done on grass lands a crop of mushrooms is the usual result. Too much salt does destroy vegetable growths, and make the land barren, and therefore salt is used in garden paths, to destroy troublesome weeds; but it will destroy the grass, too, if permitted to touch it.

The destructive power is recognised, but the custom must be mainly regarded as symbolical. *Pliny* say: 'Every place on which salt is found is barren, and produces nothing.' It was very natural that when a district was depopulated, and, as far as possible, turned into a desert, it should, in a symbolic way, be sowed with salt.

In *Bagster's Bible* some illustrations of this custom are given. 'Sigonius observes that when Milan was taken, A.D. 1162, the walls were razed, and it was sown with salt. And Brantome informs us that it was an ancient custom in France to sow the house of a man with salt who had been declared a traitor to his king. Charles IX., King of France, the most base and perfidious of human beings, caused the house of Admiral Coligni (whom he and the Duke of Guise caused to be murdered, with thousands more Protestants, on the eve of St. Bartholomew, 1572) to be sown with salt!'

*Lange* says, favouring the idea that it was a symbolic act: 'The usual explanation of this proceeding is, that by it Abimelech intends to declare Shechem an unfruitful land, a land of salt, as it were. But this explanation, although accepted by all recent expositors, does not appear to be satisfactory. For to make the land unfruitful, he neither intends nor, if he did, were he able; for no one will think of

such a salting as would actually bring about this result. He can only intend to say, that this city, being unfaithful to its covenants, and forgetful of its oaths, has ceased to exist, and is never more to be known as a city. When Joshua inflicted a similar destruction on Jericho, he swore that it should never be rebuilt (Josh. vi. 26). Abimelech makes the same declaration in the act of strewing salt; for salt is the symbol of an oath, just as among all nations, not except the dull tribes of Siberia, it was the symbol of covenants. The salt which he strewed over Shechem intimated both the cause and the perpetuity of the vengeance inflicted.'

For illustrations of the use of 'salt' as a figure for barrenness and desolation, see Deut. xxix. 23; Jer. xvii. 6; Ezek. xlvii. 11; Zeph. ii. 9.

It may be interesting to add a note on the peculiarities of salt in Bible lands. In Palestine this substance is procured from the rock salt at the south end of the Dead Sea, and also from the salt deposits on the shores of that lake, and from various marshes. From this last source most of the salt now used is procured. 'It is not manufactured by boiling clean salt water, nor quarried from mines, but is obtained from marshes along the seashore, or from salt lakes in the interior, which dry up in summer, as the one in the desert north of Palmyra, and the great lake of Jebbûl, south-east of Aleppo.' Much earth and impurity is collected with this salt; and with the chloride of sodium, which easily dissolves in water, much insoluble sulphate of lime is mixed; so that there is an insipid residuum, the 'salt which has lost its savour,' and which travellers assure us they have seen literally 'trodden under foot.'

### The Sins of Eli's Sons.

1 SAMUEL ii. 17: 'And the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*The fault of these young priests seems to have concerned a mere matter of ceremonial order, and it is strange to find so deep a moral significance attached to it.*

**Explanation.**—Acts can never be safely judged as mere acts. They must be considered as done by particular persons, and by those persons as standing in particular relations, and under special responsibilities. They must even be tested in view of the motives and intentions of the actors. Before God sin must ever lie, not in the bare act, but in the will of the person acting. And God read the heart of these young men through their covetous, inconsiderate, dis-

obedient, and self-willed actions. A little thing may suffice to reveal a bad heart : and it may be a *very* bad heart which finds expression in a little thing. The sin of these young priests concerned but a little matter, but it was very great before God, because it was just the very kind of sin which only utterly wrong-hearted men could do.

*Canon Spence* says : ‘The whole conduct of these high-priestly officials showed they were utter unbelievers. They used their sacred position merely as affording an opportunity for their selfish extortions, and, as is so often the case now, so it was then, their unbelief was the source of their moral worthlessness. In all the strange rites and ceremonies of the Levitical law, there was a higher symbolism involved. This was ruthlessly set at nought and trampled on by these reckless, covetous guardians of the worship of Israel. Portions of the sacrifice fell legally to the ministering priests in lieu of fee. It was fair “that they which ministered at the altar should live of the altar.” The “heave leg” and the “wave breast” of the slaughtered victim were theirs by right, and these the sacrificing priest was to receive after the *fat* portion of the sacrifice had been burnt upon the altar. But to take the flesh of the victim, and roast it before the symbolic offering had been made, was a crime which was equivalent to robbing God. It dishonoured the whole ceremony.’

*Dean Stanley* has a fine reference to these young priests. ‘Hophni and Phinehas (the two sons of Eli) are, for students of ecclesiastical history, eminently suggestive characters. They are true exemplars of the grasping and worldly clergy of all ages. It was the sacrificial feasts that gave occasion for their rapacity. It was the dances and assemblies of the women in the vineyards and before the sacred feast that gave occasion for their debaucheries. They were the worst development of the lawlessness of the age, penetrating, as in the case of the wandering Levite of the Book of Judges, into the most sacred offices. But the coarseness of these vices does not make the moral less pointed for all times. The three-pronged fork which fishes up the seething flesh is the earliest type of grasping at pluralities and Church preferments by base means; the open profligacy at the door of the Tabernacle is the type of many a scandal brought on the Christian Church by the selfishness or sensuality of the ministers.’

*Kitto*, after describing carefully the nature of the young priests’ exactions, adds : ‘What wonder that the people were disgusted at these proceedings, and that the result was, that they abstained from bringing their peace-offerings to the altar, seeing that their doing so subjected them to such insult and oppression, and produced circumstances so revolting to their religious feelings’

## Gods of the Hills and of the Plains.

1 KINGS xx. 23: 'And the servants of the King of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.'

**Question.**—*Is the sentiment thus expressed based on any common and general idea of idolatrous people?*

**Answer.**—Apart from Divine revelation men have never been able to conceive the unity of the Divine Being. They recognised a variety of forces at work, acting, some for good and some for evil, and they deified all these forces. In a similar way they observed differing characteristics of countries, in their conformation, climate, productions, etc., and they marked off the gods of each country as having answering features. It was quite in accordance with the general sentiment, therefore, that these Syrians should explain their defeat by suggesting a difference, if not superiority, in the God of Palestine, as the God of the hills. Their reasoning is curious to us, but perfectly natural to them, seeing they believed in the restricted local power of particular deities. The idea they lighted on was suggested by the fact that Palestine was a hilly country, and it expressed the very simple fact that the Syrian chariots were found unsuitable for warfare when it was impossible to furiously dash at an enemy, as the chariots were wont to do in the plains. The real cause of the Syrian defeat, judged from the human standpoint, was the failure in the military skill of adapting engines and weapons to the precise expedition. It is not an unusual thing for men to accuse the gods, in order to excuse their own mistakes and follies.

'In the parcelling out of the earth by paganism among national and territorial gods, and among gods who presided over the various forms, and powers, and qualities of nature, we find many gods of the mountains, and some, but not so many, of the valleys. At the present day the Hindoos have their gods of the hills, and also of the lower places. Thus Siva, Vishnu, and Murruga-Murte, are those of the high places; while Vyravar, Urruttera, and many demons, are the deities of the lower regions. So, in classical antiquity, we meet with Collina, the goddess of the hills, and Vallina, of valleys. We also hear of the god Montinus, and of a god Peninus, who had his name from a part of the Alps so called, where he was worshipped, and where also the goddess Penina was honoured. Even Jupiter had names from mountains, as Olympius, Capitolinus, etc.; and the "great universal Pan" is called "mountainous Pan" by Sophocles.'

*Stackhouse* says : 'The Syrians might have a conceit that the god of Israel was a god of the mountains, because Canaan, they saw, was a mountainous land ; the Israelites delighted to sacrifice on high places ; their law, they might have heard, was given on the top of a mountain ; their temple stood upon a famous eminence, as did Samaria, where they had so lately received a signal defeat ; for their further notion was, that the gods of the mountains had a power to inject a panic fear into any army whenever they pleased.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* regards the explanation of these officers of the King of Syria as a mere political device. 'The Syrian chiefs suggest that the Israelite gods cannot be resisted on the hills, but that they will be found, even within the limits of their own country, less powerful on the plains than among the mountains. This may have been a mere politic device—the chiefs being really anxious, on military grounds, to encounter their enemy on the plain, where alone chariots would be of much service, chariots forming an important element in the strength of a Syrian army. In the plain the Israelites had always fought at a disadvantage, and had proved themselves weaker than on the hills.'

## Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water.

JOSHUA ix. 23 : 'Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.'

**Question.**—*What precise position, in relation to the Israelite nation, did these Gibeonites occupy? Are we to understand this as a description of their work, or as a figure of their dependent position?*

**Answer.**—Both, though probably the figurative aspect is the more prominent and important. *Paxton* skilfully illustrates both in the following passage :—'In the kingdom of Algiers, the women and children are charged with the care of their flocks and their herds, with providing food for the family, cutting fuel, fetching water, and, when their domestic affairs allow them, with tending their silkworms. The daughters of the Turcomans in Palestine are employed in the same mean and laborious offices. In Homer, Andromache fed the horses of her heroic husband. It is probable the cutting of wood was another female occupation. The very great antiquity of these customs is confirmed by the prophet Jeremiah, who complains that the children were sent to gather wood for idolatrous purposes ; and in his Lamentations he bewails the oppressions which his people

suffered from their enemies in these terms: "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood." Hence the servile condition to which the Gibeonites were reduced by Joshua, for imposing on him and the princes of the congregation, appears to have been much more severe than we are apt at first to suppose. The bitterness of their doom did not consist in being subjected to a laborious service, for it was the usual employment of women and children, but in their being degraded from the characteristic employment of *men*, that of bearing arms, and condemned, with their posterity for ever, to the employment of females.'

Illustrating the kinds of work which these Gibeonites had to do, *Van Lennep* tells us that 'at Constantinople water is supplied to all the houses by Armenian Christian Sakkas, who convey it in large leather bags suspended from the shoulder; and no one belonging to any other nation would venture to infringe upon the monopoly. They are also the porters of the capital. But the trade in charcoal and wood is in the hands of the Turks, who alone hew the latter. The celebrated Smyrna porters are all Turks from Konieh (Iconium), and the business is confined to certain families, whose children are trained to it from childhood.'

It seems to have been thought that reducing these Gibeonites to a servile condition would limit, if not wholly remove, their evil influence as idolaters in the land. There is not much danger of a nation taking up with the religion of its slaves.

*Kitto* seems to limit the judgment to duties connected with the tabernacle service. He says: 'Such was the respect felt by all the Israelites for the oath which had been taken, that no one supposed there was any other course now to be followed than to spare their lives and respect the property of the Gibeonites; yet, to punish their deception, it was directed that they should henceforth be devoted to the service of the tabernacle, and be employed in the servile and laborious offices of hewing the wood and drawing the water required in the sacred offices, from which the Israelites themselves were thenceforth relieved. It is not to be supposed that the whole, or the greater part of them, were thus employed at once. A certain number of them performed it in rotation, while remaining in possession of their city and their goods.' Later on, they were identified as the Nethinims.

## Customs at Sacrificial Feasts.

**1 SAMUEL ix. 22 :** And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the guest-chamber, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons.'

**Question.**—*What special significance attached to the feasts which usually followed acts of sacrifice?*

**Answer.**—It is somewhat remarkable that the attention of Bible students should be so engrossed with the sacrifices as almost entirely to neglect the feasting which were connected with them, and completed the symbolical meaning of them. When the sacrifice was not wholly burnt, a portion of it was used as food, both by the priests and also by the offerers themselves. The custom of feasting together after sacrifice is of the greatest antiquity among all nations, and it is alluded to by Homer. The idea of it is, that reconciliation with God having been effected through sacrifice, God invites the offerers to feast with Him as His friends. For illustration we may be reminded that a king would be likely to seal his reconciliation with an offended subject by inviting him to stay and dine with him. Apart from this feast, the offerer would have no response to his sacrifice, no sign of his acceptance.

Some see in the sacrificial feasts a type of the communion of the Lord's Supper, which we observe after our Lord's great sacrifice for us. That, amongst its other suggestions, certainly does keep in our minds the state of acceptance with God, into which we enter through the sacrifice of our Lord. It is our spiritual feast following upon a spiritual sacrifice.

*Kitto* explains the singular way in which Samuel did honour to Saul at this feast : 'He assigned to this travel-worn but noble-looking stranger the place of honour, which we know was the right-hand corner, and directed the cook to set before him the most distinguished portion of the meat. This was the shoulder ; and it seems to have been, under Samuel's direction, reserved for this purpose. We apprehend that this was the *right* shoulder, which, as the due of the sacrificer, had been assigned to Samuel ; and he had thus directed it to be prepared for his expected guest. We the rather think this, as we are aware of no distinction belonging to the *left* shoulder ; whereas the assignment of the *right* shoulder, the priestly joint, to the stranger, was a most remarkable distinction and honour, well calculated to draw general attention to him, and, together with his stately figure and the honourable place assigned him, to lead to the expectation of some remarkable disclosures respecting him.'

## The Temple of Dagon resting on Two Pillars.

JUDGES xvi. 29 : 'And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and leaned upon them, the one with his right hand, and the other with his left' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*No building that we can conceive of could hold thousands of persons on the roof, and yet rest on two pillars so close together that a man could grasp both.*

**Explanation.**—Dr. Thomson, in *Land and Book*, has, once for all, met and settled this difficulty. He says : 'The roofs in Gaza were then *flat*, as they are now, and it does not require a very large space for three thousand people who stand as close as they can be packed. So much for the size of the building. A further explanation may be found in the peculiar topography of Gaza. Most of it is built on hills, which, though comparatively low, have declivities exceedingly steep. The temple was erected over one of these, beyond a doubt, for such was and is the custom in the East ; and in such a position, if the central columns were taken out, the whole edifice would be precipitated down the hill in ruinous confusion. There is such a steep declivity on the north-east corner of the present city, near the old dilapidated castle and palace, and the houses in that vicinity have fragments of columns wrought into the walls, and laid down as *sills* for their gates.'

The older explanation was that a gallery ran round, or partly round, an open court, protected by a balustrade. Samson was placed in the court ; the lords and ladies were grouped under the gallery ; the people crowded on the gallery, pressing against the balustrades. When the two central pillars of the one side gave way, the balustrade would break, the panic of the people would overweight the unsupported parts, and piece after piece of the gallery would give way, heaping its ruins on the lords and ladies below, and casting the people, in crowded struggling masses, on the open court. It is easy to realize the scene from this point of view. 'When the pillars were removed, the weight of three thousand people brought the roof down with a fearful crash, and those above fell on those below, together with the stones and timbers, and a great slaughter was the result.' We may reasonably suppose that the removal of the central pillars was a beginning of the catastrophe—the first cause, but not the entire cause of the calamity. The removal of a chief prop, or support, is followed oftentimes by a perilous strain on the weaker portions. *Kitto* tells us, that 'in very many Eastern buildings the whole centre of the principal side of the enclosed area (towards which all parts of

the building generally front) is made to rest upon one or two pillars, so that their removal would most certainly involve the downfall of that part; and from the connection of the parts, this would involve the overthrow of the whole range of building on that side at least. And if this be the obvious result in ordinary cases, much more certain would it be here, when the roof, and no doubt the galleries, if any, looking into the court, were crowded with people, whose weight must have created so great a strain and pressure, that the withdrawal of any single prop must bring the whole to the ground in an instant.'

'When Dr. Shaw was at Algiers he frequently saw the inhabitants diverted upon the roof of the dey's palace, which, like many more of the same quality and denomination, has an advanced cloister over against the gate of the palace, made in the form of a large pent-house, supported only by one or two contiguous pillars in the front, or else in the centre. Supposing, therefore, that in the house of Dagon was a cloistered building of this kind, the pulling down of the front or centre pillars which supported it, would alone be attended with the catastrophe which happened to the Philistines.'—*Paxton*.

## Intercessory Sanctifying.

**JOB i. 5:** 'And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced God in their hearts' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*The relations of a man with God are strictly individual and personal, and the business of personal religion cannot be delegated to anybody, or undertaken by anybody in our behalf.*

**Explanation.**—The story of Job belongs to patriarchal times, and we are not very well informed on the peculiarities of patriarchal religion. Whether the Book of Job is a relic of the writing of very ancient times, or, as seems more probable, a composition of the age of Solomon, based upon a very early legend, or history, the surroundings of the story are strictly patriarchal; there is in the book no reference to priests, revealed law, temple, or organized worship.

But it should be understood that religion for man, in every age, and in every clime, must take two distinct, but very closely related, forms. It is always a matter which the individual must settle for himself, and in his own way, by direct and personal relations with God. And since men must dwell together in families and societies, it must have some outward forms of expression, in which all may agree to join. The common worship is always found to be directly

helpful toward the culture of the personal life, and the personal piety is the source of ever fresh vitality in the common worship. Probably, if we could keep to the stricter meaning of terms, we might say that every man should have both 'piety' and 'religion.'

The question we have to meet is this, What forms of common and united worship were established in patriarchal times? They must have been such as were suitable to tribes that were frequently moving from one spot to another; and they must have been of the simplest character. The chief of the tribe was regarded as the priest, and by the simple rite of the burnt-offering, on fitting occasions, he expressed for his tribe the sense of God's claim to perfect service, the conviction of short-coming and sin, the desire for pardon, and the readiness to offer a full consecration of self unto the Lord. These recurring acts of sacrifice became the education of the tribe in religious truths and duties; they helped, but they did not stand in place of, nor remove the necessity for, personal godliness.

Job's burnt-offerings belong to the class of helpful ceremonies, which can express piety, but cannot take the place of it; can call to duty, but cannot stand instead of doing our duty to God and to man. Such ceremonies may be helpless formalities, but they may be spiritual realities, helpful expressions for devout and sincere souls.

Job seems to have allowed the period of cheerful feasting to pass, and then he sent for his children, made them perform certain ceremonial ablutions, and then join in a united service. The burnt-offering was the only form of sacrifice known to the patriarchs. 'The whole victim was consumed by fire, a perfect holocaust, representing the absolute right of God over His creatures, and the absolute surrender of the creature's self. The original word means "ascending offering"; the victim went up, so to speak, to heaven in flame and smoke.'

*Matthew Henry* deals with this subject quaintly but suggestively. 'He sent to them to prepare for solemn ordinances, "sent and sanctified them," ordered them to examine their own consciences, and repent of what they had done amiss in their feasting, to lay aside their vanity, and compose themselves for religious exercises. Thus he kept his authority over them for their good, and they submitted to it, though they had got houses of their own. He offered sacrifice for them, both to atone for the sins he feared they had been guilty of in the days of their feasting, and to implore for them mercy to pardon, and grace to prevent the debauching of their minds, and corrupting of their manners by the liberty they had taken, and to preserve their piety and purity.'

## The Cruelty of the Executions at Rabbah.

2 SAMUEL xii. 31 : 'He brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln; and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon.'

**Difficulty.**—*Unless such horrible cruelty can be relieved by explanations, it gives a very painful impression of David's character.*

**Explanation.**—*Dr. Cumming* makes a correction in the translation which we should be very glad if we could accept, but the severe customs of ancient times encourage the sterner view of these transactions. He says : 'The Hebrew word *beth*, which is here translated "under," does not mean *under* (that is, placed beneath), but means *to* (in the sense in which we say, in ordinary language, "I put him to the plough"); the literal meaning is that he put them *to* saws, and *to* harrows, and *to* axes, and *to* the making of bricks—that he made them perpetual working slaves. There is no warrant whatever for the construction that he *destroyed* them by saws, and harrows, and axes, or inhumanly forced them into the furnace of the brick-kiln. He simply set them to a laborious drudgery.'

*Kitto* wishes he could accept this relief of the story. But he thinks it has very little real foundation. 'It does much violence to the Hebrew words, which it takes in an unusual and previously unimagined acceptation. Some of the alleged labours are also unsuited to the age and country or the people. Firewood, for instance, is so scarce in Palestine, that the people of so many cities could not have found employment as hewers and sawers of wood; and the only public want in this respect, that of the tabernacle and its altar, was already provided for by the services of the Gibeonites; while the people generally used stubble and dried dung for fuel. Then, for building, stone has always been more used than brick in Palestine, and it is, therefore, marvellous that the more laborious work of quarrying stone is not named, if penal labours were really intended; and as to iron mines, there is not the least evidence that any were ever worked in the territories over which David had sway.

'Besides, if David thus dealt with the Ammonites, he would have been far less severe to them than the war law of the age authorized, and far less so than to the Moabites and Edomites, of whom a large proportion of the males in the one case, and all who could be caught in the other, were destroyed. And is this credible in regard to a people the aggravation of whose conduct had been so much greater?

'Putting captives to death by torture was not a war custom of the

Hebrews, whose legislation is remarkable beyond that of any other people for the absence of torturing punishments.' *Kitto* thinks, therefore, that these punishments were retaliatory for similar treatment of Jewish and other prisoners who had been taken by the Ammonites. He cites the case of Adoni bezek, which has a distinct bearing upon this, because it shows that 'the Hebrews were accustomed to deal out to their enemies the same measures which they received from them. And this was quite necessary, it being the only way in which other nations could coerce such offenders into an adherence to the established usages of war.'

It may be added that David is not personally responsible—only governmentally responsible—for actions done by his generals and soldiers in the time of siege. David should only be *officially* connected with a matter which was, in all probability, done before he knew anything about it. We must never forget that in all these war movements of David's reign, Joab was the leading, masterful spirit, and such deaths by torture suit his nature better than David's.

### Accursed Thing.

JOSHUA vi. 17 : 'And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord. *Rev. Ver.* : 'devoted.'

**Difficulty.**—*Unless some custom or sentiment of the age is found to relieve the severity of this judgment, it must seem to us inexplicable, and beyond what the occasion demanded.*

**Explanation.**—The word 'accursed' is likely to convey a wrong impression. It would be better to read 'devoted,' and associate the word with the offering of first-fruits as sacrifice to God, and solemn acknowledgment that *all* was recognised as His. *Josephus* helps us to the right idea of this devotement when he says, 'Joshua commanded the Israelites to reserve the silver and gold of Jericho, the first city taken by them, as the first-fruits of their successes, to God.' In verse 19 the metal spoil is spoken of as 'consecrated unto the Lord'; but the fact is, that all Jericho was consecrated to the Lord—some of it by being destroyed, sent to Him on the wings of fire; and some of it by being reserved for use in the Lord's tabernacle.

*Kitto* so fully meets the difficulty as it is stated above, that his entire passage may be given : 'It has seemed to some rather a severe exaction that the soldiers should have been forbidden, under the severest penalties, from appropriating to themselves the least benefit from the spoil of this wealthy city. But there may be seen many reasons for it. The principal seems to have been to impress upon

them in the most lively manner the fact that the conquest of the city was not in any respect due to the power of their arms, and that therefore they had no right to any portion of the spoil. Nothing was so well calculated as this privation to remind them to whom alone this important conquest was due. It was also a prudential measure. On the one hand, it tried the obedience of the people—and, all things considered, it is certainly a wonderful instance of the religious and military discipline of the troops, that an order of this stringent nature was so well obeyed; while, on the other hand, it would have been inexpedient to allow the soldiers at the outset to glut themselves with the spoils of a rich city, whereby they would have been more disposed for luxury and idleness than for the severe labours which lay before them in the martial conquest of Canaan. The city had also been won without the exhausting toils or feats of valour which might seem to demand such recompense. It may be added that it has been at all times usual in military operations to *deal severely with the first town taken by storm*, the garrison of which has held out to the last, in order to strike such a dread into the people as may facilitate further conquest, or induce submission in order to avoid a similar doom. Upon the whole, Jericho was to be regarded as the first-fruits of conquest, and as such was to be offered up to the Lord as a burnt-offering.’

*Mr. W. H. Groser* has some useful remarks concerning this ‘ban.’ ‘There is a remarkable provision in the Mosaic law (first mentioned abruptly, as a thing well known), that when persons or property had been devoted by a solemn vow to God, there could be no redemption of them by a gift to the sanctuary, as in other cases. They became *cherem*, or *anathema*, “devoted”: if persons, they were to be slain; if property, given to the sanctuary. Thus Jonathan narrowly escaped being made *cherem*, through his father’s rash vow; but doubtless such cases were extremely rare. It was permitted, however, to “devote” an enemy’s city by such a vow; and this occurred in the war with the Canaanite King of Arad in the time of Moses. Now it is remarkable that no *command* to put human beings under the ban is to be found in the Mosaic law, except for deliberate *idolatry* on the part of an individual Israelite, or the inhabitants of an Israelitish city.

## Lots for collecting the Wood for Offering.

NEHEMIAH x. 34: 'And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law.'

**Question.**—*Was this a revival of some old custom, or the necessity of some new and peculiar circumstances?*

**Answer.**—It seems that it had been made the duty of the Gibeonites to provide the wood that was required for the Temple service; but in the restored company of exiles it was nobody's duty, or rather everybody's. Some arrangement, therefore, was necessary, to ensure that the duty was performed by somebody.

The note in the *Speaker's Commentary* gives all that need be said on this subject: 'No special provision was made by the law for the supply of wood necessary to keep fire ever burning upon the altar; nor do David or Solomon appear to have instituted any definite regulations on the subject. It remained for Nehemiah to establish a system by which the duty of supplying wood should be laid as a burthen in turn on the various clans or families which were regarded as constituting the nation. The lot was used to determine the order in which the several families should perform the duty. A special day (the 14th of the fifth month, according to Josephus) was appointed for the bringing in of supplies; this day was after a time regarded as a high festival, and called the "Feast of the Wood Offering."'

## Night Customs in Eastern Encampments.

JUDGES vii. 11, 12: 'Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outermost part of the armed men that were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the East lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*It is very strange to find a host like this, in a hostile country, making no sort of provision for sudden attacks, by appointing outposts and sentinels.*

**Explanation.**—We must carefully distinguish between the orderly invasion of a country by an organized army, and the swarming of a large collection of nomad tribes into a fertile territory about harvest-time. The invasion of Israel by the united Midianites and Amalekites was an overwhelming rush of whole tribes into the land, eating up everything, as would a plague of locusts. Each tribe, and division of tribe, would have its armed men, its trained

fighting men ; but the great mass of the people were camp-followers, a class specially liable to sudden panic.

*Canon Farrar* says : ' The invasions of these Arab tribes were of the most crushing and irritating kind. Living in idleness and marauding expeditions, they let the Israelites sow their corn, and came themselves to reap and carry it away. Alyattes, King of Lydia, treated the people of Miletus in exactly the same way, leaving their houses undestroyed, solely that they might be tempted to return to them, and plough and sow once more. The same thing goes on to this day. The wretched Fellahîn, neglected and oppressed by the effete and corrupt Turkish Government, sow their corn, with the constant dread that they are but sowing it for the Bedouin, who yearly plunder them, unrepressed and unpunished.'

There is a strong Eastern superstition against night attacks, and even against travelling by night. Guides hasten the parties they are conducting, so that they may gain shelter before the darkness comes on. This common feeling gives a kind of security, so that sentinels, or outposts, are not thought to be necessary. Camps are formed with the non-combatants in the centre, and the armed men on the outskirts, and this is regarded as sufficient ; but except in cases of actual danger, when an opposing force was known to be near, even this precaution would not be taken. Probably, also, the very vastness of this host, which was really its danger, was thought to constitute an impregnable strength.

The only hint of special protection in this case is found in the expression used in verse 11, ' unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.' The *Revised Version* renders (as given above), ' unto the uttermost part of the armed men that were in the camp.' The *Speaker's Commentary* says the meaning is uncertain, but the most probable is ' arranged in divisions,' marching or camping in companies. ' The armed men seem to have been encamped together, in one part of the camp, that nearest to the hostile army of Gideon.' *Lange* translates, ' As far as the line (limit) of the vanguard to the camp.' He compares the two and a half tribes who marched in the vanguard of the Israelite army, and says that ' to the same class of soldiery belonged the *chamusim* (armed men), to whom Gideon approached. They formed the outer rim of the encampment.'

Leslie Porter, in his *Handbook for Palestine*, describes such a host as this of Midian, only on a smaller scale, seen by him in the spring of 1857, when the Bedouin sheik, Akeil Agha, assembled his men in Esdraelon, after the massacre of the Kurds at Hattin, to

divide the plunder. 'They spread over the plain, countless as locusts; their camels beyond number, like the sands on the sea-shore. When I looked at the wild and fierce crowds of this disorderly army—on the spoils and booty—it seemed as if I had before me the very spectacle of the great invasion of the Midianites in the days of Gideon.'

### Absalom's Pillar.

2 SAMUEL xviii. 18: 'Now Absalom in his life time had taken and reared up for himself the pillar, which is in the King's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance, and he called the pillar after his own name; and it is called Absalom's monument, unto this day.' *Rev. Ver.*: 'Absalom's place.'

**Difficulty.**—*We have no other case of men's thus raising monuments to themselves, and we cannot but be suspicious that such a thing would hardly have been allowed in David's time.*

**Explanation.**—There is a monument called Absalom's, still to be seen in the ravine of the Kedron, but it is quite a modern erection, and can bear no relation whatever to the time of Absalom. It is, however, possible that it occupies the position of the earlier monument, though the King's Dale is identified with the Valley of Shaveh (Gen. xiv. 17), which was in the near neighbourhood of Sodom. *Josephus* tells us that the pillar was a marble one; he fixes its distance at two furlongs from Jerusalem, but he does not say from what part of Jerusalem the measurement was made; and he also says that it was named 'Absalom's Hand.'

*Buckingham* thus describes the existing monument: 'On the east, we came to the reputed tomb of Absalom, resembling nearly, in the size, form, and decoration of its square base, that of Zacharias, except that it is sculptured with the metopes and triglyphs of the Doric order. This is surmounted by a sharp conical dome, of the form used in our modern parasols, having large mouldings, resembling ropes, running round its base, and on the summit something like an imitation of flame. The dome is of masonry, and on the eastern side there is a square aperture in it.'

It was quite usual to raise cairns of stone, or single stones, as memorials of great events or important victories, but the only approach to a personal memorial of such a kind is found in the self-glorying of King Saul, who, on his return from the partial slaughter of the Amalekites, is said to have 'set him up a place,' that is, a monument, or trophy. But this is quite distinct from raising a pillar for the sake of perpetuating a man's name.

In those times, and down to recent times, it has been quite usual

for rich and great persons to prepare before their death their own tombs and sepulchres. These were usually natural or artificial caves in the rocks, but they were sometimes separate erections which should contain their bodies, and be conspicuous as their memorials. There can be little doubt that Absalom's pillar was a *tomb*, with a raised building, of handsome proportions and decorations, above it; and his hope was that he might be buried there in state as the 'beautiful prince,' and with the aid of such a monument, everlastingly remembered. The fact is called to mind, in the Scripture history, to point the moral that 'man proposes, but God disposes,' and to set in sharp contrast the actual fate of the prince, killed as he hung in a tree, cast into a pit in a wood, and covered with the stones of execration. 'His real monument was a solitary cairn in the wild forest, instead of a lordly pillar in the "King's Dale," near the capital city.'

### Passing through the Fire.

2 KINGS xvi. 3: 'But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel.'

**Question.**—*Was this only a ceremony of lustration by fire, or should we understand that the young prince was sacrificed?*

**Answer.**—The corresponding account in 2 Chron. xxviii. 3 supports the idea that the son, or sons, were actually sacrificed. There the expression used is, 'And burnt his children in the fire.'

The idol Moloch is said by the Rabbins to have been made of brass, and its throne also of brass; its head was that of a calf, and wore a royal crown; its stomach was a furnace, and when the children were placed in its arms they were consumed by the fierce heat, their cries being drowned by the beating of drums; from which (*toph* meaning a drum) the place of the burning was called *Tophet*.

It is also affirmed that the hands of the idol were made hot, and the children were passed between them, which was considered a form of lustration. Probably both views are true to the facts. On ordinary occasions the rite may have been one of simple lustration, but in times of extreme pressure the children may have been actually sacrificed.

Compare other Scripture references, as 2 Kings xvii. 31; Jer. xix. 5; Ezek. xvi. 20, xxiii. 37; Jer. xxxii. 35. Possibly, the children were not burnt alive, but first put to death; their bodies being then burnt. Very definite and trustworthy information concerning the old custom does not seem to be at command.

Moloch is best regarded as one of the forms of Baal, the Sun-god, to whom, in Carthage and Numidia, children were immolated.

The *Speaker's Commentary* says: 'The fact which seems to be certain is, that Ahaz adopted the Moloch-worship of the Ammonites and Moabites, and sacrificed at least one son, probably his first-born, according to the horrid rites of those nations. A king of Moab had once done the same when he found himself in a sore strait (2 Kings iii. 27). Another had expressed his willingness so to appease his god (Mic. vi. 7). Hitherto, apparently, the Jews had been guiltless of the abomination. Now, however, as the time of more searching trial approached, as dangers thickened, and the national existence was seen to be in peril, the awful rite seems to have exercised a fatal fascination upon them. It has been suggested that the cause of its sudden appearance, and great prevalence from the time of Ahaz to the close of the Jewish kingdom, is to be found in the influence of Assyria, which now first came to be much felt in Palestine. But there is no evidence that the Assyrians had any such custom as that here in question, or any human sacrifices at all. They had no god Moloch, although of course almost any god might bear the title of *Melech* (king). Moloch in Scripture is always connected with Ammon; and there seems to be no real ground for doubting that it was from this quarter—from Ammon and Moab—that the Jews and Israelites of the period to which we are now come adopted the practice of "causing their children to pass through the fire."'

## Idolatrous Kissing the Hand.

JOB xxxi. 27: 'And my heart hath been secretly enticed, and my mouth hath kissed my hand.' *Hebrew*: 'My hand hath kissed my mouth.'

**Question.**—*Does this refer to some peculiar movement or action characteristic of certain idol-worshippers, and somewhat resembling a masonic sign?*

**Answer.**—*Delitzsch* gives a translation which makes the action much more intelligible to us—'I threw them a kiss by my hand.' It appears that in heathen worshipping they used to kiss the hand, and then throw the kiss, as it were, towards the object of worship (1 Kings xix. 18; Hos. xiii. 2). The practice was probably adopted because the idol-figures were set up on high, out of actual reach. This 'kissing the hand' as a token of admiration and worship was an early and common practice in Syria.

The following note is given in *Biblical Things not Generally Known*, without intimation of its authorship: 'This passage is an

obscure and difficult one, on which only some side-lights can be thrown. The act may have been one of worship offered to some deity, or *the hand itself may have been the object of worship*, and we are not without indications of such a practice. The "Talmud" asserts that the hand and the foot were both regarded as objects of worship. It says that a broken piece of an idol is not to be considered an idol in itself, since it may be put to some useful purpose : if it be made of metal, it may be melted down ; and if of earthenware, it may be broken up and used again. But the hand and the foot, being objects of worship in themselves alone, whether they are broken from statues or not, are unclean, and must not be touched.

'There is a curious relic of hand-worship still preserved in Jerusalem, a rough representation of a hand being always made by the native masons on the wall of a house in the course of erection. This hand-print is made in order to avert the "evil-eye." The Jews also take care to make the same mark on a conspicuous part of the exterior of their houses just before a marriage, a birth, or any other festival. At Jerusalem a sign resembling a double arrow is frequently used instead of the hand, the Jews saying that it is a symbol of the five names of God, as are also the five fingers ; and either symbol will ward off evil from the place on which it is imprinted.

'The cornice of a cistern near Petra, in Arabia, was found not long since, to be decorated with hands printed in black and red alternately. At the present day both Jews and Mohammedans hang round their children's necks hands rudely cut out of thin plates of silver and gold ; and this is done as a charm against the "evil-eye." In Italy the first and last fingers of the hand are used for the same purpose.'

*Paxton* thinks that to kiss the hand and place it on the head is a token of respect less revolting to our minds than some that might be mentioned. He says : 'An Oriental pays his respects to a person of superior station by kissing his hand and putting it to his forehead ; but if the superior be of a condescending temper, he will snatch away his hand as soon as the other has touched it ; then the inferior puts his own fingers to his lips, and afterwards to his forehead. It seems, according to Pitts, to be a common practice among the Mohammedans, that when they cannot kiss the hand of a superior, they kiss their own, and put it to their forehead ; thus also they venerate an unseen being whom they cannot touch. But the custom existed long before the age of Mohammed ; for in the same way the ancient idolaters worshipped their distant or unseen deities. Had Job thus "kissed his hand," in the case to which he refers, it would have been

an idolatrous action, although it is exactly agreeable to the civil expressions of respect which obtained in his country, all over the East.'

## Eastern Sentiments concerning Mad People.

1 SAMUEL xxi. 15 : 'Have I need of madmen' (*Rev. Ver.* : 'Do I lack madmen'), 'that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?'

**Difficulty.**—*How would feigning himself a madman give David security in his time of peril? With us it would involve his being rigorously confined.*

**Explanation.**—David found his life in peril among the Philistines, and adopted a device which depended for its success on a prevailing sentiment of Eastern people. Easterns have ideas of spirit-possession, devil-possession, which to us seem absurd. Things which we regard as diseases, such as epilepsy, hysteria, lunacy, delirium tremens, etc., they regard as due to the presence of bad spirits in the sufferers, and they have a sort of respect for these bad spirits, and fear to touch or injure them, lest they should take revenge and afflict the injurer by transferring their presence. All sufferers of this class are therefore let alone.

David took advantage of this common sentiment. He knew he would be free to go where he pleased if the people took up the idea that he was *mad*. 'No one would touch a demented man, for insanity was held in antiquity, as it still is in the East, in some way, a divine possession.'

*Dr. Porter* says that 'many of the dervishes in the East act in the same way at present, and are venerated as saints by an ignorant and superstitious people. I have heard it said that Akeil Aga, a notorious Arab sheikh still living, when seized and imprisoned by the Governor of Acre, escaped as David did, pretending to be a madman.'

*Kitto* has the following good note : 'David "feigned himself mad," or perhaps to fall into a fit of epilepsy, which was in ancient times regarded as a form of madness. This character he acted to such disgusting perfection, that the court had no doubt of the reality of his affliction. He not only "scribbled upon the wall," but let his slaver fall down upon his beard. This last was convincing. Considering the regard in which the beard is held, the care taken of it, and the solicitude of the owner to protect it from insult and pollution, who could possibly doubt the abject and absolute madness of the man who thus defiled his own beard? On the other hand, a sort of respect for the persons thus afflicted, as if they were under

some kind of supernatural influence, has always existed, and does now exist, in the East ; so that David knew that his personal safety, and even his freedom, were guaranteed by the belief in his madness. Such was the case. The king was not, perhaps, sorry to be thus relieved from the difficulty which he saw to be gathering round the question. He therefore turned, in seeming or real wrath, to his servants, rebuking them for admitting a madman into his presence.'

*Kitto* adds that 'the Jewish writers think there was more emphasis than we are aware of in Achish's asking if *he* had need of madmen. They tell us that the king's wife and daughter were both mad, and that while David was simulating madness without, they were exhibiting the reality within, so that poor Achish might well think he had already quite enough of this.'

'It has been cleverly suggested that David was only too well acquainted with all the signs of madness, from his long and intimate association with King Saul in his darker hours of insanity.'—*Canon Spence*.

## Night Hospitalities in the East.

JUDGES xix. 18, 19 : 'There is no man that taketh me into his house. Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses ; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man that is with thy servants : there is no want of anything.'

**Question.**—*What prevailing conditions or sentiments led to so strange a limitation of hospitality ?*

**Answer.**—It is very probable that the incidents of the last five chapters of the Book of Judges are not narrated in their chronological order. They belong to the earlier period of the time of the Judges, and present to us illustrations 'of the loose condition of society during the anarchical period which intervened between the death of the elders who outlived Joshua and the government of Othniel.'

*Kitto* explains precisely what occurred : 'Gibeah stood upon a low, conical, or rather round eminence, about five miles north by east from Jerusalem. By the time the party got near this the sun went down, and the Levite concluded to turn in there. As he had no acquaintance in the place, and there seems to have been no lodging place or khan to which he could repair, he tarried, as the custom was, in the street, sure that some one would soon invite him to his house. We do not think there is any charge against the men of Gibeah on *this* account merely, for no one could receive him till it was known that he wanted reception, and this was the proper mode

of making his want known. The same practice still exists in the East under the like circumstances, and it is not long that anyone has to wait before entertainment is offered to him. But in this vile place it is expressly stated that "no man invited him to his house," and he was left waiting in the street, until at last an old man, who was also of Mount Ephraim, and who very possibly recognised the Levite, saw the party as he returned from his work in the fields, and invited them to his humble dwelling. . . . The gross neglect of the duties of hospitality must have given the Levite some misgiving as to the character of the place, seeing how highly these duties are estimated in the East, and seeing that his Levitical character gave him a more than common claim to kind and generous entertainment.'

*Jamieson* says: 'The towns in Palestine at this remote period could not, it seems, furnish any establishment in the shape of an inn or public lodging-house; and hence we conclude that the custom, which is still frequently witnessed in the cities of the East, was then not uncommon, for travellers who were late in arriving, and who had no introduction to a private family, to spread their bedding in the streets, or, wrapping themselves up in their cloaks, pass the night in the open air. In the Arab towns and villages, however, the sheikh, or some other person, usually comes out and urgently invites the strangers to his house. This was done also in ancient Palestine (Gen. xviii. 4, xix. 2), and that the same hospitality was not shown in Gibeah, seems to have been owing to the bad character of the people.'

It is clear that the same vices prevailed in this town as in Sodom in the older time; and these vices were utterly destructive of social order and family life. Probably these pictures of rioting and unrestrained wickedness are given in the Scripture to prepare us for the great change from a pure theocracy to that of an orderly human government, which could at once repress and punish evil-doers. Theocracy is the sublimest idea of government, but so long as men are self-willed and self-seeking, it is not found to be practically efficient. Modifications of it had to be made because of the hardness of men's hearts.

The old man who did offer hospitality asks questions which seem to express his astonishment that anyone should think of passing the night in Gibeah out of doors. The city had such a bad name in the neighbouring region, that travellers shunned it; but there is no sufficient ground for assuming that so vile a state of things was representative of the degraded condition of the country generally.

## Egyptian Embalming.

GENESIS I. 2: 'And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel.'

**Question.**—*As embalming was connected with idolatrous notions, how are we to understand Joseph's adopting such heathen methods?*

**Answer.**—Apart from superstitious associations, embalming was the national mode of doing honour to the memory of great persons, and probably in this way only did Joseph regard it. The reverence thus shown for the bodies of the dead was grounded on a primitive traditional belief in its future resurrection, which was a material setting of the spiritual truth which has been revealed to us.

If a more precise reason for the embalming of Jacob be sought for, it may be found in the necessity for preparing and perfuming the patriarch's body, in view of the long journey which had to be taken if it was to be buried in the cave of Machpelah. Only an embalmed body could have been kept unburied for so long a time.

There is abundant information at command concerning this Egyptian custom. Only a few details can be appropriately given in this connection.

*Jamieson* says: 'In ancient Egypt the embalmers were a class by themselves. The process of embalming consisted in infusing a great quantity of resinous substances into the cavities of the body, after the intestines had been removed; and then a regulated degree of heat was applied to dry up the humours, as well as decompose the tarry materials which had been previously introduced. Thirty days were allotted for the completion of this process; forty more were spent in anointing it with spices. The body, tanned from this operation, was then washed and wrapped in numerous folds of linen cloth—the joinings of which were fastened with gum, and then deposited in a wooden chest, made in the form of a human figure.'

The *Speaker's Commentary*, noting the fact that the physicians are said to have embalmed Jacob, and that the physicians were not usually employed in this work, suggests that it was a simpler kind of embalming than usual, and that the proper embalmers could not be employed because Jacob was a foreigner.

'The Greek historians mention three ways in which mummies were made. In the first, the brain was extracted through the nose, and the intestines were removed. The body was then filled with myrrh, cassia, etc., after which it was steeped in natron for seventy days. After the seventy days were over, the body was washed, and

swathed in linen bandages gummed on the inside until every part of it was covered. In the second, a material called oil of cedar was introduced, which dissolved the intestines, so that they could be removed without mutilating the body. It was then laid in natron, which dissolved the greater part of the flesh and left only the skin and bones. In the third, the body was merely salted for seventy days, and then given back to the friends. The first method would cost about £250 of our money, the second £60, while the third would be very cheap.'—*E. A. W. Budge, M.A.*

## Swimming Methods.

ISAIAH XXV. 11 : 'And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim.'

**Difficulty.**—*This does not accurately describe the kind of action in swimming with which we are familiar.*

**Explanation.**—In our method of swimming the hands are brought together at the chest, then thrust forward together, and widened out in the form of an arch. There is no such beating of the water as is indicated in the figure of this passage. It seems that the people of the East are fond of bathing, and many of them are expert swimmers. They all swim 'hand over hand,' alternately raising each arm out of the water, and thus never presenting the whole breast, but only one side to the stream. The American-Indians, who are generally expert swimmers, uniformly practise the Oriental mode. Among the Assyrian sculptures which represent persons in the act of swimming, there does not appear to be one which indicates a different method. The lifting up of each arm, and bringing it down with force, well expresses the repeated blows by which Moab was to 'be trodden down as straw for the dunghill' (*Van Lennep*).

It should, however, be noticed that *Dr. A. Clarke's* translation of verse 10 gives a possible explanation of the passage now before us, in accordance with Western modes of swimming. This is best given in a note from *Roberts*, who says on the translation of the words 'for the dunghill,' as 'under the wheels of the car.'—'This may allude to their ancient cars of war, under which Moab was to be crushed, or under her own heathen cars, in which the gods were taken out in procession. To spread forth the hands, as a person when swimming, may refer to the involuntary stretching forth of the limbs when the body was crushed with the weight of the car; or to the custom of those who, when they go before the car in procession, prostrate themselves on the ground, and spread out their hands and legs as if

swimming, till they have measured the full distance the car has to go, by throwing themselves on the earth at the length of every six feet, and by motions as if in the act of swimming. The whole of this is done as a penance for sin, or in compliance with a vow made in sickness or despair.'

### Beds of Gold and Silver.

ESTHER i. 6 : 'The beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble.' *Rev. Ver.* : 'couches.'

**Question.**—*What articles of furniture may we suppose to be indicated by the term 'beds' ?*

**Answer.**—Bedsteads and bedding, such as we are familiar with, are not usually found in the East. A bed-chamber was not arranged for, a closet sufficing for the keeping of the quilts and mattresses during the day. The divan, or platform along the side or end of an Oriental room, sufficed as a support for the bedding. There is but little distinction of the bed from the sitting furniture, the same article being used for nightly rest and during the day. The term *beds* in the text would better be rendered *couches*, on which guests could recline, and which either had frames of solid gold and silver, or were inlaid with ornaments of those costly metals. They stood on an elevated floor of parti-coloured marble.

*Forbes* says that these beds of gold and silver may receive illustration from modern Asiatic furniture ; the diyan, or hall of audience, as also the room for receiving guests in private houses, is generally covered with a Persian carpet, round which are placed cushions of different shape and size, in cases of gold and silver rincob, or of scarlet cloth embroidered ; these are occasionally moved into courts and gardens, and placed under the *shahmyanah* for the accommodation of company.

*Wilkinson* gives very interesting details respecting the chairs and couches of Egyptian mansions and palaces. 'Many of the fauteuils were of the most elegant form, and were made of ebony and other rare woods, inlaid with ivory, covered with rich stuffs, and very similar to some now used in Europe, to which indeed they have frequently served as models. None of these have yet been found in the tombs of Thebes ; but chairs of more ordinary quality are occasionally met with, some of which are in the British Museum and in the Leyden Collection. They are much smaller than the fauteuils of the sculptures, the seat being only from eight to fourteen inches high, and are deficient, both in elegance of form and in the general style of their construction : in some the seat

is of wood, in others of interlaced string or leathern thongs, in appearance, as well as in rank, not very unlike our own rush-bottomed chairs ; and they probably belonged to persons of inferior station, or to those rooms which were set apart for casual visitors. Various are the forms of chairs which occur in the sculptures, representing scenes of domestic life, and sacred subjects. Some were, on the principle of our camp-stools, furnished with a cushion, or covered with the skin of a leopard or other animal, which could be easily removed when the chair was folded up ; and it was not unusual to make other seats, and wooden head-stools or pillows, in the same manner ; one of which was found by me at Thebes, and is now in the British Museum. They were adorned in various ways : being bound with metal plates, or inlaid with ivory and foreign woods ; and, even in some ordinary chairs, sycamore, or other native wood, was painted to imitate that of a more rare and valuable quality. The seat was frequently of leather, painted with flowers or fancy devices ; and the figure of a captive, or a conquered foe, was frequently represented at the side, or among the ornaments of the chair. Sometimes the seat was formed of interlaced work of string, carefully and neatly arranged, which, like our Indian cane chairs, appears to have been particularly adapted for a hot climate ; but over this even they occasionally placed a leather cushion painted in the manner already mentioned. Most of the chairs and stools were about the ordinary height of those now used in Europe, the seat nearly in a line with the bend of the knee ; but some were very low, and others offered that variety of position which we seek in the kangaroo chairs of our own drawing-room. The ordinary fashion of the legs was in imitation of those of some wild animal, as the lion, or the goat, but more usually the former, the foot raised and supported on a short pin ; and what is remarkable, the skill of their cabinet-makers, even in the early era of Joseph, had already done away with the necessity of uniting the legs with bars. Stools, however, and more rarely, chairs, were occasionally made with these strengthening members, as is still the case in our own country ; but the form of the drawing-room fauteuil and of the couch was not degraded by so unseemly and so unskilful a support. The back of the chair was equally light and strong. It was occasionally concave, like some Roman chairs, or the throne of Solomon ; and in many of the large fauteuils a lion formed an arm at either side ; but the back usually consisted of a single set of upright and cross bars, or of a frame receding gradually, and terminating at its summit in a graceful curve, supported from without by perpendicular bars ; and over this was thrown a handsome pillow of coloured cotton, painted leather, or

gold and silver tissue, like the beds at the feast of Ahasuerus, mentioned in Esther; or like the feather cushions, covered with stuffs, and embroidered with silk threads of gold, in the palace of Scaurus.'

### Covenant-Sealing with Gifts.

GENESIS xxi. 30: 'And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.'

**Question.**—*Was this a special device of Abraham's, or did he simply act in accordance with recognised Oriental customs?*

**Answer.**—There is good reason for thinking that a custom is referred to which even now prevails in Eastern lands. It seems that there had been a dispute between Abimelech and Abraham as to the right of possessing the well at Beersheba, which Abraham appears to have digged. Abraham gave Abimelech, in addition to other presents, seven ewe lambs, as a witness for him that he had digged the well, and this present was regarded as settling the dispute and sealing the covenant between them.

*Bruce*, the traveller, while in Abyssinia, wished to go from one place to another, and the Sheikh had assured him that the journey might be undertaken with safety. 'But,' said I, 'suppose your people meet us in the desert, how shall we fare in that case? Should we fight?' 'I have told you, Sheikh, already,' says he; 'cursed be the man that lifts his hand against you, or even does not defend and befriend you to his own loss, even were it Ibrahim, my own son.' Then, after some conversation, the old man muttered something to his sons in a dialect Bruce did not understand, and in a little time the whole hut was filled with people, the priests and monks of their religion, and the heads of families. 'The great people joined hands, and uttered a kind of prayer—really the oath—about two minutes long, by which they declared themselves and their children accursed if ever they lifted their hands against me in the field, in the desert, or on the river; or, in case that I or mine should fly to them for refuge, if they did not protect us at the risk of their lives, their families, and their fortunes, or, as they emphatically expressed it, "to the death of the last male child among them." Medicines and advice were given on my part, faith and promises were pledged on theirs, and then two bushels of wheat and seven sheep were carried down to my boat.'

*Dean Payne Smith* says: 'The word in Hebrew for "swearing" is a passive verb, literally signifying "to be seavened," that is, done or

confirmed by seven. In this ancient narrative we see a covenant actually thus made binding. Seven ewe lambs are picked out and placed by themselves, and by accepting these Abimelech bound himself to acknowledge and respect Abraham's title to the well. Apparently this manner of ratifying an oath was unknown to the Philistines, as Abimelech asks, "What mean these seven ewe lambs?" but it is equally possible that this question was dictated by the rules of Oriental courtesy. When Abraham had picked out the lambs, it became Abimelech's duty to ask what was the purpose of the act, which was then explained, and as soon as the lambs were accepted, the ratification was complete.'

Such symbols are common in all countries. In Scotland, until a recent period, the symbol in the sale of land was a handful of earth and stones; for a ferry, an oar and water; and for church patronage, a psalm-book and the keys of the church.

### Seven Days' Silent Sympathy.

JOB ii. 13: 'So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.'

**Difficulty.**—*It is hardly possible to conceive that three men actually remained seated, without food, or drink, or spoken word, for so long a time as seven days.*

**Explanation.**—It is only our ignorance of Eastern customs that leads us to assume that Job's three friends never moved, and took no food, during those seven days. The passage only states that they *spoke no word*, and to sit in perfect silence for a very prolonged period is quite a customary Eastern practice. Seven days was the usual period of mourning, and all we can reasonably assume is that there was some degree of fasting, not enough to imperil health or life.

Describing the mourning customs in connection with the death of Lazarus, of Bethany, *Dr. C. Geikie* tells us that the sisters had fasted all the day after the death, and had since eaten nothing but an occasional egg, or some lentiles; for that was the only food allowed mourners, for the first seven days. When returned from the burial, 'the sisters, with veiled heads, even in their own chamber, and with unsandaled feet, sat down on the earth, in the midst of a circle of at least ten friends, or professional mourners, with rent clothes and dust on their heads. None spoke till the bereaved ones had done so, but every sentence of theirs was followed by some word of sympathy and comfort, and by the wails of the mourners. And thus it would

be for seven days.' According to this account, if Job did not speak, the friends would not.

The *Speaker's Commentary* has the following valuable note: 'The cause of this prolonged silence has been questioned. Among the Jews it is a point of decorum, and one dictated by a fine and true feeling, not to speak to a person in deep affliction until he gives an intimation of a desire to be comforted; such was possibly their motive, as seems to be indicated by the last words in the chapter. Others see in this silence one sign of perplexity as to the origin of the infliction; and a suspicion that Job's conscience might be burdened with some hidden guilt: in either case the long, weary suspense was too much for his feelings, he could bear it no more, and at last gave expression to the agony which he had hitherto endured in silence. With that expression the long colloquy is opened in which the causes and principles of heaven-sent afflictions are discussed.'

*Barnes* provides a very apt and suggestive illustration. He says: 'It cannot be supposed that they remained in the same place and posture for seven days and nights. The meaning is, that they mourned with him during that time in the usual way. An instance of grief remarkably similar to this, continuing through a period of six days, is ascribed by Euripides to Orestes.

"'Tis hence Orestes, agonised with griefs  
And sore disease, lies on his restless bed  
Delirious. Now six morns have winged their flight,  
Since by his hands his parent massacred,  
Burnt on the pile in expiatory flames.  
Stubborn the while he keeps a rigid fast,  
Nor bathes, nor dresses; but beneath his robes  
He skulks, and if he steals a pause from rage,  
'Tis but to feel his weight of woe and weep."

*Kitto* says: 'To the statement that the friends sat upon the ground seven days and seven nights in silence, it may be objected that it is scarcely credible that Job himself, weakened by disease and excessive grief, should be able to sit thus seven days successively without speech or motion; and at least equally so, that his friends, who were in perfect health, and just off a long and tiresome journey, should forego during all that time the natural uses and offices of life, to sit without speaking a single word. Knowing the capacity of the Orientals for remaining so long in one place, and even in one posture, as would be astonishing to Europeans, we are not quite so much impressed with this difficulty as some have been. Nevertheless, we may admit that such texts as these are not to be too stringently interpreted. We conceive that, rightly understood, it does not pre-

clude them from sleeping, eating, and going about—not even from some slight expressions of sorrow and condolence, but that it does mean that they constantly, during that period, returned to sit with him, spending, in fact, as much of their time with him as they possibly could; during which, beholding his distress of mind, they made no attempt to enter into conversation, argument, or discussion with him. This is quite sufficient to meet the demands of the text, as we may see by other instances, in which the inspired penmen speak of a thing as being continually done, which was only done very frequently.'

### Planting a Grove.

GENESIS xxi. 33: 'And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.' *Rev. Ver.*: 'tamarisk-tree.'

**Difficulty.**—*Since 'groves' are associations of idolatrous worship, could Abraham have been right in this act?*

**Explanation.**—There is considerable dispute on the question whether Abraham planted a single tree, as a memorial or witness of his claim to the well, or whether he separated a spot for sacred worship by surrounding it with a circle of trees. As the passage so clearly connects his act with the offering of worship, it is very probable that the English Authorized Version contains the true idea, and that a sacred place was made round the Jehovah-altar.

A thing may at first be done in simplicity, and for those who do it at first it may be quite proper and helpful: but as time goes on the thing may become guileful; it may be filled with evil associations, and perverted to mischievous uses. Then it must be spoken of as wrong, and then it will be denounced by God; but we have no right to say that because a certain thing was wrong in the age of the later kings, therefore it must also have been wrong in the days of Abraham. We must judge each case in the light of the knowledge, revelation, and sentiments of its time.

In favour of the view that Abraham only planted a single tamarisk-tree, as a declaration that he had a right to the well beside which it grew, the custom prevailing in Turkey may be referred to. 'When a person plants a tree in unreclaimed land, he becomes the owner of the tree as well as of five feet of ground all round it.'

*Kitto*, taking the view that Abraham planted a grove or circle of trees, deals with the question, how that could be right for Abraham which was so vigorously denounced in later times. He says: 'We must regard Abraham, not as an isolated individual, but as the chief and master of many hundred persons, who worshipped God with

him by sacrifice and prayer. They must have met together for these acts of worship, which doubtless the patriarch himself conducted. One tent could not have contained them all, but a grove of trees would afford all the shelter required. Hence, when men had no fixed abode, or afterwards, when they had not yet learned how to construct edifices large enough for many persons to join them in an act of worship, groves of trees became their temples—the first temples of mankind. It was also, it would seem, regarded as becomingly reverent, that the altar appropriated to sacrificial worship, should not stand out among the common objects of the wayside, but should be decently veiled from careless notice by a screen of trees. So the worship in groves was not in itself blameable. It was even usefully solemnizing ; and it appears to have involved a recollection of Eden, to which it would be difficult to ascribe any other than a salutary influence. But when gross idols arose around, and the groves were considered proper to their worship, it behoved God to make a distinction between His worship and theirs, and to show that he had no fellowship with the powers of darkness . . . Nothing is more notorious than the shameful orgies that were celebrated in these sacred groves ; and it might well be feared that the presence of a grove would soon bring around the sanctuary a crowd of idle devotees, coming, not to worship, but to enjoy themselves, and where the leafy screen and the cool and pleasant shade would soon allure to all kinds of licentious freedom.'

### Bowing on the Bed's Head.

GENESIS xlvii. 31 : 'And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.'

**Question.**—*What special significance can we suppose to have attached to this act, seeing it is so carefully recorded?*

**Answer.**—The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives a totally different form to this incident. He says (ch. xi. 21), 'And worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.' His rendering is taken from the *Septuagint*, and it gives the probable explanation of the act of Jacob. From the Egyptian inscriptions we learn that the *staff* was the symbol of office ; and so, if Jacob 'had bowed himself toward the head of Joseph's staff, he would have been simply acknowledging the authority of Joseph as deputy and representative of the king. The inscriptions show that the Egyptians were in the habit of touching the head of the official staff in token of homage when they made oath, as Jacob did upon the occasion in question.'

*M. Chabas*, in his interesting essay on Egyptian judicial proceed-

ings, cites the following passage describing the taking of an oath by a witness in a trial at Thebes: 'He made a life of the royal lord, striking his nose and his ears, and placing himself on the head of the staff.' This seems to have been the ordinary oath when the witness bowed himself on the magistrate's staff of office.

*Inglis* tells us that, 'in Hebrew, when written without the vowel points, the word for "bed" and for "staff" is the same; and according to the vowels we read either *matteh*, a staff, or *mittah*, a bed. As Jacob does not appear to have been in bed at the time of Joseph's visit, the rendering "staff" is to be preferred, it being natural that the venerable old man, as he worshipped God, should bow down on the staff which he had carried through all his wanderings" (ch. xxxii. 10).

The picture of the bowed patriarch, bent with the weight of years and feebleness, and leaning heavily on his staff, is a very natural and very beautiful one. And, as the Oriental beds are little more than mats on the raised floors, it is not easy for us to conceive what can be meant by the 'bed's head.'

*Theodore*t gives an admirable paraphrase, which should be regarded as in every way satisfactory. 'He strengthened himself upon his staff, and so, leaning forward, worshipped God.'

It has been asked, 'Why did Jacob bow himself?' This *Wordsworth* answers by saying: 'The act of bowing himself is mentioned as a consequence of Joseph's consent to his request, that Joseph should bury him in Canaan; and the most probable opinion seems to be, that Jacob bowed himself in adoration of God, for His mercy in restoring Joseph to him, and because his prayer for burial in Canaan was granted, and because the oath which he had asked from Joseph, and which Joseph had just sworn, was a solemn appeal to Almighty God. To His great name, in thankful adoration, the aged Patriarch, the pilgrim of one hundred and forty-seven years, bowed his head, leaning on the staff of his pilgrimage, the emblem of that power which had supported him in all his wanderings, and which had now brought him near to his end in peace.'

## A Man's Shadow marking the Time.

**JOB vii. 2:** 'As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work.'

**Question.**—*What custom connected with day-labourers may we suppose is referred to in this passage?*

**Answer.**—It may be that the verse should bear the simple meaning, 'As the bond-slave daily panteth after the shade, and as

the hireling longeth for the end of his work.' Then the allusion is to the severity of the restraint and toil under which the bond-slave is placed. Exhausted with the heat he longs for shade; weary with long hours he sighs for night and rest. Nothing is more grateful in Oriental countries, when the sun pours down intensely on burning sands, than the shadow of a tree, or the shade of a projecting rock. And it is common to all languages to speak of night as enveloped with shadows.

But it is quite possible that the speaker had in mind a familiar Eastern custom, of which there are traces among country people even in our own land and time—the custom of standing in the sunshine and guessing the time from the length of the shadow thrown by the man's own body. The daily practice of this custom, and daily observance of the position of the sun, enables men by this means to calculate the time with surprising exactness.

*Roberts* tells us that 'the people of the East measure time by the length of their shadow. Hence, if you ask a man what o'clock it is, he immediately goes in the sun, stands erect, then looks where his shadow terminates: he measures the length with his feet, and tells you nearly the time. Thus they earnestly desire the *shadow*, which indicates the time for leaving their work. A person wishing to leave his toil often cries out, "How long my shadow is in coming!" When asked, "Why did you not come sooner?" his answer is, "Because I waited for my shadow."'

We have seen it stated that in some parts of England it was customary, a few years ago, before watches became common, for all labourers, whom a long familiarity had taught the direction in which the fields lay in respect to the cardinal points of the heavens, when they wished to ascertain the hour of the day, to turn their faces towards the north, and observe the bearing of their own shadow. By this simple expedient they would often guess within a few minutes of the time.

### Lifting up the Head.

GENESIS xl. 13: 'Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place.' (See ver. 19.)

**Question.**—*Is this an ordinary poetical figure of 'restoration,' or is it based on some particular Oriental custom?*

**Answer.**—*Stackhouse* gives a very interesting explanation, which seems so reasonable that we are disposed to accept it as the true one. He says that the ancients, in keeping their reckonings, or accounts of time, or their list of domestic officers or servants, made

use of tables with holes bored in them, in which they put a sort of pegs, or nails with broad heads, exhibiting the particulars, either number or name, or whatever it was. These nails or pegs the Jews call heads, and the sockets of the heads they call bases. The meaning, therefore, of Pharaoh's lifting up his head is, that Pharaoh would take out the peg, which had the cupbearer's name on the top of it, to read it; that is, would sit in judgment, and make examination into his accounts; for it seems very probable that both he and the baker had been either suspected or accused of having cheated the king, and that, when their accounts were examined and cast up, the one was acquitted, while the other was found guilty. And though Joseph uses the same expression in both cases, yet we may observe that, speaking to the baker, he adds, that Pharaoh shall lift up thy head from off thee, that is, shall order thy name to be struck out of the lists of his servants, by taking thy peg out of the socket.

### Under the Rod.

LEVITICUS xxvii. 32: 'And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord.'

**Question.**—*Does this refer to an ordinary method of counting animals, or to some special method adopted for reckoning the tithe?*

**Answer.**—There is nothing special about the figure here used; and the idea that 'passing under the rod' represents our times of affliction, belongs entirely to the sphere of Christian sentiment.

A Christian missionary admirably explains the figure. He says: 'In Syria, just below my house, which stood facing the Mediterranean Sea, there was a sheepfold—a large area surrounded by high walls. It had but one entrance, a little gateway near the corner. It was long and narrow, and a man must stoop to get into it. Every night the shepherd brings home his flock from outside the city, or from the distant field, or the mountain side, to be gathered into this fold. And as they pass into this narrow gateway, they must go one by one. No huddling, and crowding, and jostling, as boys do sometimes at play; but, as they pass in, the shepherd stands by the gate, and holds his crook over them, to count them one by one as they go in. Every night the shepherd does this, and so he knows if any are left out in the field or on the mountains.' This counting of the sheep, as they pass under the rod, is referred to in the above passage, as will be clearly seen by comparing it with Jer. xxxiii. 13. 'In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south,

and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judæa, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth (counteth) them.' 'This is a work of restoration, and the fields there shall have flocks in great number, and they shall pass under the hand of the shepherd, who tells them one by one as he gathers them into the fold.'

*Wordsworth's* note on the verse gives a similar explanation. 'As the sheep went of their own accord out of the fold they were to be counted, and every tenth of the *increase* was to be given to the Lord.'

*Jamieson* adds to our knowledge of the shepherd customs alluded to. He says: 'This refers to the mode of taking the tithe of cattle, which were made to pass singly through a narrow gateway, where a person with a rod, tipped in ochre, stood, and counting them, marked the back of every tenth beast, whether male or female, sound or unsound.'

## Monthly Prognosticators.

ISAIAH xlvii. 13: 'The astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators.' Heb.: 'Those that give knowledge concerning the months.'

**Question.**—*Can this distinct class be identified; and can their precise work be explained?*

**Answer.**—*Canon Rawlinson* tells us that 'the Assyrian and Babylonian libraries contained hundreds of tablets, copied with the utmost care, on which were recorded the exorcisms, the charms, the talismans, and the astronomical prognostics, which had come down from a remote antiquity, and which were implicitly believed in. The celestial phenomena were constantly observed, and reports sent to the court from observatories, which formed the ground-work of confident predictions. Eclipses were especially noted, and, according to the month and day of their occurrence, were regarded as portending events, political, social, or meteorological.

'The division of the learned class into three distinct bodies, devoted to different branches of the mystic lore in which all participated, receives illustration from the native remains, where the literature of magic comes under three principal heads: (1) written charms or talismans, which were to be placed on the bodies of sick persons, or on the doorposts of afflicted houses; (2) formulæ of incantation, which had to be recited by the learned men in order to produce their proper effect; and (3) records of observations, intended to serve as grounds for the prediction of particular events, together with collec-

tions of prognostications from eclipses or other celestial phenomena, regarded as having a general applicability. The preparation of the written charms or talismans was probably the special task of the "magicians," or *Khertummim*, whose name is formed from the root *Kheret*, which signifies an "engraving tool" or "stylus." The composition and recitation of the formulæ of incantation belonged to the *ash shaphim* or *mecashaphim*, the "astrologers" and "sorcerers" of our version, whose names are derived from the root *ashaph* or *cashaph*, which means to "mutter." The taking of observations and framing of tables of prognostics is probably to be assigned to the *gâzerim* or "dividers," in our version "soothsayers," who divided the heavens into constellations or "houses" for astronomical and astrological purposes.'

*Henderson* thinks that the astronomers of Babylon published a monthly table of the leading events that might be expected to happen.

*Professor Sayce* gives some additional information. He says: 'Even the science of the Babylonians and their Assyrian disciples was not free from superstition. Astronomy was mixed with astrology, and their observation of terrestrial phenomena led only to an elaborate system of augury. The false assumption was made that an event was caused by another which had immediately preceded it; and hence it was laid down that whenever two events had been observed to follow one upon the other, the recurrence of the first would cause the other to follow again. The assumption was an illustration of the well-known fallacy: "Post hoc, ergo propter hoc." It produced both the pseudo-science of astrology and the pseudo-science of augury. The standard work on astronomy was that called "The Observations of Bel," compiled originally for the library of Sargon I. at Accad. Additions were made to it from time to time, the chief object of the work being to notice the events which happened after each celestial phenomenon. Thus the occurrences which at different periods followed a solar eclipse on a particular day were all duly introduced into the text, and piled, as it were, one upon the other. The table of contents prefixed to the work showed that it treated of various matters—eclipses of the sun and moon, the conjunction of the sun and moon, the phases of Venus and Mars, the position of the pole-star, the changes of the weather, the appearance of comets; or, as they are called, "stars with a tail behind and a corona in front," and the like.'

## Reconciliation Presents.

GENESIS xx. 14, 16 : 'And Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and men-servants and women-servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. . . . And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver : behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee ; and in respect of all thou art righted' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*It does not seem easy to understand why Abimelech made these presents, seeing that, if he acted violently, he was led into his act by Abraham's deception.*

**Explanation.**—The *Septuagint* renders this verse thus : 'These shall be to thee for an honour of thy countenance, and to all the women that are with thee ; and speak the truth in all things.'

The *Vulgate* renders thus : 'This shall be to thee for a veil of the eyes to all that are with thee, and wheresoever thou shalt go ; and remember that thou hast been detected.'

*Dean Payne Smith* thinks the correct rendering probably is : 'And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother (a gift worth) a thousand (pieces) of silver : behold, it shall be to thee for a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee (that is, so large a compensation for the wrong done thee in taking thee from thy husband, will be a proof to all thy friends and attendants that thou hast not been disgraced, but treated with honour) ; and in respect of all that has happened thou art thus righted.'

*Wordsworth* gives the three possible explanations. 'The sense seems to be, I have been to blame, and acknowledge my sin, and make restitution for it. But thou art not altogether free from fault. If thou hadst been on thy guard, and hadst kept thyself from public view, as a modest matron ought to do in a strange land, I should not have been beguiled to do what I have done. And now I have given to him, who is thy *husband*, and whom thou didst *call* thy *brother*, a thousand pieces of silver ; let this be to thee a covering of thine eyes ; let it be an offering from me to expiate my offence, and to appease thee, and to prevent thee from looking on me with anger.

'Perhaps, also, the words may be applied in another sense. Let this sum be for the covering of thine eyes in the provision of veils for thy face wherever thou goest, so that thou mayest not ensnare others, as thou hast ensnared me, but mayest be attired with shamefacedness and modesty. This exposition is confirmed by what is related of Rebekah (ch. xxiv. 65), that when she heard of Isaac's approach, she dismounted from her camel, and covered her head with a veil.

‘Perhaps, also, there may be an allusion here to the usage of covering a bride with a veil ; and Abimelech may also intend to say, I have given a thousand pieces of silver to thy *brother*, who is henceforth to be declared to be thy *husband* ; let this be as a dowry from me, and let it be applied to procure thee a bridal veil, so that all may know thee to be married to him, and so prevent thee from pretending to be his *sister*, and protect thy modesty from encroachments.’

As a general rule, the simplest explanation of a Scripture figure is likely to be the correct one ; and we often err in searching for deep meanings when the one that is ready to hand is quite satisfactory. In this case we prefer the very simple, and almost prosaic interpretation, that the money was a charge to purchase veils for Sarah and her attendants, who in tent-life had not worn them, that she might henceforth be known as a married woman, exclusively belonging to her husband. There is good reason for the statement, that unmarried females among the pastoral tribes do not wear any kind of veil, and married women only partially veil the face by means of a kerchief. In towns the face is wholly covered. Abimelech, familiar with the custom of the towns, and deceived by the freer customs of pastoral life, counsels Sarah to get a veil and shade her face altogether with the kind of veil worn by women in the towns.

### Communication by Signs.

**I SAMUEL XX. 20:** ‘And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark.’

**Question.**—*Did not Jonathan make a needless mystery of this communication with David, especially as, after the formal signs, he ventured upon personal intercourse with him ?*

**Answer.**—Jonathan was placed in very difficult circumstances ; and we must carefully distinguish between what actually happened, and what he feared might happen, and therefore must be guarded against. David ran serious risks in thus venturing into the neighbourhood of the enraged Saul. Jonathan ran very serious risks in venturing to communicate with his friend. Saul was so suspicious of Jonathan that he would hardly let him leave his presence, and it was most unlikely that he would allow him to leave the vicinity of the court without having one of the officers attendant upon him. In that case he could only convey information to David through some sign previously agreed on between them.

Things turned out very much better than Jonathan could possibly

have anticipated. Under the excuse of going to practise archery, Jonathan managed to get away from the court with no other attendant than a little lad to carry his arrows. But he had to be cautious, as even this lad might tell on him. So he carried through the sign just as he had arranged with David ; he sent back the boy with the arrows, and then he could venture safely upon a brief converse with his friend. The boy was quite unsuspecting. If he thought that his master soon got tired of his practising that day, it would be but a passing thought to one who had been taught implicitly to obey.

We need not hesitate to say that, by their very nature, Eastern people prefer scheming and roundabout and half-deceptive ways of acting to those which we consider blunt and straightforward. They enjoy acting by signs, and getting up little plots ; and there may have been something of this disposition even in Jonathan.

### Cursing the Day.

JOB iii. 8 : 'Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to rouse up leviathan' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*On what popular astronomical notions is this poetical figure based?*

**Answer.**—The general idea of the first clause of this verse seems to be this, 'Let those who proclaim days unlucky or accursed curse that day as pre-eminently so ; or let them recollect that day as a standard or sample of cursing. "Let it be as cursed as Job's birthday."' The *Speaker's Commentary* thinks there is evidently an allusion to ancient and widespread superstitions : 'One of the earliest and most natural corruptions of religious feeling was a desperate struggle against the powers of nature ; the sorcerer was believed, and believed himself, to be able to arrest the course of day and night by incantations. It does not follow that Job adopted the belief, though he found in it apt expression of his feelings.

The second clause was translated, in the Authorised Version, 'who are ready to raise up their mourning.' If that translation could stand, the allusion would be to the hired mourners of the East, who clamorously bewail family calamities. But the *Revised Version* is undoubtedly the correct one in this case. Leviathan is the crocodile, used here as a symbol of the dragon, the enemy of light, who, in old Eastern traditions, is conceived as ready to swallow up sun and moon, and plunge creation in original chaos and darkness.

*Wordsworth* says, without approving of the suggestion, because he

prefers a vague spiritualizing of the passage : ' Some modern expositors suppose that there is a reference here to the Oriental mythology, in which it was imagined that there is a great dragon among the heavenly bodies (called in Hindu *râhu*) who is subject to incantations, and who chases the sun and moon, in order to swallow them up in darkness.'

*Herodotus* reports a people of Africa, living in the vicinity of Mount Atlas, who were accustomed to curse the day and the sun. He says : ' Of all mankind, of whom we have any knowledge, the Atlantes alone have no distinction of names ; the body of the people are termed Atlantes, but their individuals have no appropriate appellation. When the sun is at the highest, they heap on it reproaches and execrations, because their country and themselves are parched by its rays.'

So far as we can trace the associations of the passage, it appears that leviathan was regarded as the dragon, an astro-mythological being, which has its place in the heavens. Whether it be the constellation still known by the name ' Draco,' or Dragon, or whether it be *Serpens* or *Hydra*, constellations lying further south, it is not possible to decide. But the dragon, in ancient popular opinion, had the power to follow the sun and moon, to enfold, or even to swallow them, and thus cause night. Eastern magicians pretended to possess the power of rousing up the dragon to make war upon the sun and moon. Whenever they wished for darkness they had but to curse the day and hound on the dragon to extinguish for a time the lamp that enlightened the world. Job, in his bitterness, curses the day of his birth, and utters the wish that those who control leviathan would, or could, blot that day and its deeds from the page of history.

## NEW TESTAMENT.

## Salt Swept Out.

MATTHEW v. 13: 'If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.'

**Question.**—*Is this a strong poetical figure of speech, or is it based upon actual observation of facts of Eastern life?*

**Answer.**—The salt of Palestine differs materially from that with which we are familiar, as obtained from salt-rocks or salt-water, and carefully purified. There is an inexhaustible supply of salt on the southern shores of the Dead Sea. *Robinson* describes a mountain of fossil salt in that district, which is five miles in length, and one of the chief sources of the salt in the sea itself. Saltpits, formed in the marshes at the southern end of the lake, are completely coated with salt, which is deposited periodically by the rising of the waters. It was the belief of the Jews that salt would, by exposure to the air, lose its virtue, and become saltless. *Maundrell* gives some support to this notion by his assertion that he found the surface of a salt-rock in this condition.

It does not appear, however, that the above passage was regarded as other than a strong figure of speech, or illustration, until *Dr. Thomson*, the writer of 'The Land and the Book,' recorded for us the precise Eastern association. Now we know that our Lord literally described a scene of everyday Eastern life. This is one of the most striking things for which we are indebted to *Dr. Thomson*. He says: 'It is plainly implied that salt, under certain conditions so generally known as to permit him to found his instruction upon them, did actually lose its saltiness; and our only business is to discover these conditions, not to question their existence. Nor is this difficult. I have often seen just such salt, and the identical disposition of it that our Lord has mentioned. A merchant of Sidon having farmed of the Government the revenue derived from the importation of salt, brought over an immense quantity from the marshes of Cyprus—enough, in fact, to supply the whole province for at least twenty years. This he had transferred to the mountains, to cheat the Government out of some small percentage. Sixty-five houses in Jûne—Lady Stanhope's village—were rented and filled with salt. These houses have merely earthen floors, and the salt next the ground is in a few years entirely spoiled. I saw large quantities of

it literally thrown into the street, to be trodden under foot of men and beasts. It was "good for nothing." Similar magazines are common in this country, and have been from remote ages, as we learn from history both sacred and profane; and the sweeping out of the spoiled salt and casting it into the street, are actions familiar to all men. . . . It is a well-known fact that the salt of *this country*, when in contact with the earth, or the rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily connected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all, and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust—not to fruitful soil, however. It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown, and this is the reason why it is cast into the street. There is a sort of verbal verisimilitude in the manner in which our Lord alludes to the act—"It is cast out" and "trodden under foot." So troublesome is this corrupted salt, that it is carefully swept up, carried forth, and thrown into the street. There is no place about the house, yard, or garden where it can be tolerated. No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street; and there it is cast, to be trodden under foot of men.'

### Release by 'Corban.'

MATTHEW xv. 5, 6: 'But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*What explanation can be given of this immoral Rabbinical custom?*

**Answer.**—So great was the solemnity attached to vows, whether they were rightly or wrongly made, that the Rabbins were prepared to argue that it was of less importance that parents should be honoured, than that a vow should be broken. It is the universal penalty that follows on attaching undue importance to *forms*, that presently they come to override even the great natural laws of human associations, and the Divinely announced commandments of the Decalogue. Ecclesiastical rules come to be valued above Divine laws; and ecclesiastical rules can be made to excuse the neglect of the first and essential human duties.

This Rabbinical custom is not, however, generally understood, and, indeed, it is so repulsive to all men of noble and generous feeling, that it is difficult to secure for it a patient consideration. It seems to have been established as a principle that any man was at liberty to make a vow consecrating his property, or any portion of it,

to the service of the Temple, after his decease; or even during his life, with the understanding that he would keep the use of it so long as he needed. Properly speaking, such 'devotements' ought always to be thankofferings for special mercies received, and they ought only to have been accepted when they had such a religious feeling inspiring them.'

But such a custom of 'devotements' was open to serious abuse by unprincipled men. If a man's property was in peril of being seized by his creditor, he could at least save the life-use of it by making it a gift to the Temple. And if any special claim—as by parents or brothers—was made on a certain portion of his property, he successfully evaded the claim by affirming that the particular portion had been devoted, by a vow, to the service of God. 'Corban' denotes anything offered to God or the service of the Temple. 'Almost every possession a man had might be rendered "Corban" by him, even his own person; and, when once offered to God, the article was sacred, and could on no account be turned to a secular use until redeemed. All that was necessary was that a man should say respecting a given thing, "May this be as the Temple to me;" or, "as the altar," etc.; or, "as the (sacred) fire," etc.; or, "as the sacrifice to me." Thereupon a man, being displeased with his aged or poor parents, might free himself from all obligation to support them by merely pronouncing one of these forms; and then, when either father or mother appealed to him for aid, he would say, "Whatever I might have bestowed on you is now Corban." And the Pharisees, as Christ complains, insisted on the fulfilment of this execrable vow, even though it necessitated the violation of natural instinct, as well as the command, "Honour thy father and thy mother." In fact, there was no duty a villain might not shun by this infamous procedure.'

The Talmud actually teaches that everyone ought to honour his father and his mother, or to support them if they were poor, *unless he has vowed to the contrary*. We cannot wonder that such abominable doctrines excited our Lord's utmost indignation, and drew from Him one of His severest censures.

### Anointing the Sick.

JAMES v. 14: 'Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*There does not seem to be any reasonable connection between anointing with oil and praying, and there is no other case in which such use of oil is taught as a Christian duty.*

**Explanation.**—Instead of making a careful inquiry into the ordinary use of oil by the people of Eastern countries, and in that

direction seeking for the explanation of the allusions made by St. James, it has been the fashion to associate this anointing of the sick with the official anointing of priests and kings, and, perhaps, prophets. In this way a symbolical and sacramental character has been given to what is really a simple custom of ordinary family life. This verse offers an illustrative instance of the common mistake of seeking extraordinary explanations of Scripture, when a very simple and every way satisfactory explanation lay close at hand.

Oil is in familiar use in the East as an article of the toilet. It takes very much the place for them of our pomades and scents. But it seems that the use of oil for the toilet was regarded as a sign of health, and the neglect of oil was just as precisely the sign that a man was out of health. Those who were sick were not allowed to be anointed, nor were those who were passing through a time of mourning.

The ancient customs and sentiments in relation to anointing may be effectively illustrated by our customs, or the custom of our fathers, in connection with the shaving of the beard. The man who is ill neither troubles about shaving, nor will his friends trouble him; and his half-grown beard is a sign that the man is sick. As soon as he gets better and begins to take his place again in life, he will be sure to shave, and show due regard to his personal appearance. We know the sick man of the West is better by his asking for the shaving instruments. We know the sick man of the East is better by his asking for the *oil* necessary to make his toilet.

It may be expressed precisely thus: 'The sick man will neither trouble himself, nor be troubled about shaving; but as soon as he begins to recover he will return to his old and cleanly habits. So the ancients would neglect daily anointing while under sickness, and their return to their old ways was the sign of recovering health. When, therefore, James enjoins the elders to anoint the sick—that is, at once make his usual toilet—after prayers for his restoration, he really says just this, "Pray for him with full faith, and show that you have such strong faith, *by acting towards him as if he really were recovered*. Whatever things ye ask when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. Anoint the sick man as if he were restored to health again.'" The elders were to 'help him rise from the bed, wash, anoint his head and dress, and rejoice with him in view of the healing mercies of God.'

If they had faith, they should give that faith active expression; they should '*show* it by their works'; the particular works which would best show it in this case were, that they should at once proceed to wash, dress, and anoint the sick man, as if they were quite sure that God had heard their prayer and made him well.

With this may be compared our Lord's demand for some act which would give an outward expression to faith. Thus, in the case of the man with the withered hand, our Lord commanded him to 'stretch forth his hand.' The man might fairly have said, 'That is just what I cannot do.' But he could if he believed. So in the case of the paralyzed man. Jesus said, 'Take up thy bed, and walk.' A paralyzed man bidden to walk ! But he could if he believed, and the trying was the show of faith.

As some authority may be desired for an explanation which may be accepted only with hesitation, on the very ground of its extreme simplicity, we give the following passages from Van Lennep's *Bible Customs in Bible Lands*, pp. 133, 134:

'The use of oil in anointing the body appears to have been general in ancient times among all the nations dwelling around the Mediterranean. Allusions to this use abound in all ancient authors. The heroes of Homer are described by him as restoring their wearied limbs after a battle by frictions of oil. This was Alexander's practice. It was Pompey's daily habit also, as well as that of all the wealthy Romans. We find this custom alluded to in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments. It is mentioned as forming a habitual part of the toilet on special occasions (Ruth iii. 3 ; 2 Sam. xii. 20 ; Micah vi. 15)—not to be indulged in in case of mourning (2 Sam. xiv. 2 ; Dan. x. 2, 3). The head was anointed in connection with the daily recurring ablution, as mentioned in Matt. vi. 17.

The 'extreme unction' practised by the Roman Church is defended by a misinterpretation of the passage in James, for extreme unction is never applied until it is considered certain that the patient is about to die ; whereas the words in James, as well as in Mark vi. 13, connect anointing the sick with recovery. We do not consider that in these cases oil was used either as a means or a symbol ; the anointing was simply an exercise of faith, similar to Peter and John's saying to the lame man at the gate of the Temple called Beautiful, 'Rise up and walk.' The elders of the church, after praying for the sick man, *were to treat him as though he were recovered.*

## Fire-Salting.

MARK ix. 49 : 'For everyone shall be salted with fire.'

**Difficulty.**—*Since salt and fire are such different agencies, it is perplexing thus to find them associated together.*

**Explanation.**—This is one of the most difficult passages in Mark's Gospel, both the meaning of the terms and the connection

with what goes before being doubtful and obscure. Among the various interpretations which have been proposed, one or two points seem to be agreed upon, which may therefore be first stated, as a basis for determining the other questions. It is commonly admitted that the last clause of this verse is an allusion to, if not a direct quotation from, the law of sacrifice in Lev. ii. 13, from the Septuagint version of which it differs only by the change of 'gift' to 'sacrifice,' a term used in the older classics to denote the sacrificial act or service, but in later Greek extended to the sacrificial victims, or the animals admitted to the altar. It is also agreed that there is allusion to the antiseptic and conservative effects of salt, and that these are figuratively transferred to fire. But what fire is meant, and in what sense it is conservative, and how the whole verse is related to what goes before and follows, these are questions as to which there is a great diversity of judgment. The different hypotheses entitled to attention may, however, be reduced to two, essentially distinguished by the fact that one of them regards this as a promise, and the other as a threatening or warning. According to the former view, our Lord, referring to the well-known requisition of the law already mentioned, that every sacrificial victim must be salted—that is, rubbed or sprinkled with salt—and also to the universal association between salt and soundness or purity of meats, avails Himself of these associations to assure His hearers that every one whom God approves, or towards whom He has purposes of mercy, though He may pass through the fire of persecution and affliction, including the painful self-denial recommended in the previous context, will be purified and saved thereby; or, as an offering to God, salted with such fire, just as the literal sacrifice was salted at the altar. This is certainly a good sense in itself, and favoured by the strong analogy of the fiery trial which Peter mentions in his First Epistle (iv. 12). The objections to it are, that it gives to *fire* a sense entirely different from that in the preceding context, and that it does not explain the logical connection indicated by the 'for.' The other explanation supposes the connection to be this:—Our Lord had six times spoken of eternal torments as *unquenchable fire*, from which no man could escape without self-denial and the mortification of sin. The immediately preceding verse concludes with the solemn repetition of that fearful saying, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,' *i.e.*, their sufferings are endless and unceasing. But how can the subject of such sufferings escape annihilation? By being kept in existence for the very purpose of enduring them. This awful fact he clothes in a figurative form, derived from the sacrificial ritual of Moses.

Every victim must be rubbed with salt, the symbol of incorruption and preservation ; so these victims shall be salted, not with salt, but fire. The Divine wrath that consumes them will preserve them, *i.e.*, from annihilation—not *from* suffering, but *for* suffering. It is no objection to this view of the passage that it takes salt in a sense not justified by usage, which requires it to mean preservation for a good end, or salvation. This is a mere assumption, just as easy to deny as to affirm. The essential idea of the figure is preservation from destruction, or continued existence, and may just as well be used both in a good and bad sense, as leaven (which the law excluded from all offerings no less strictly than it required salt) is used in both ; and just as we might say that the *lost* sinner will be *saved* from annihilation, although not from ruin. On the other hand, this interpretation has the advantage of continuing the train of thought unbroken, taking fire in the same sense as throughout the previous context, and concluding this terrific warning in a manner far more appropriate than a promise of salvation by the fire of suffering, however pleasing and delightful in itself.—(*J. A. Alexander.*)

*Olshausen* thinks the sense of the passage is this : ‘Because of the general sinfulness of the race, every individual must be salted with fire, either, on the one hand, by his entering, of his own free will, on a course of self-denial and earnest purification from his iniquities; or, on the other hand, by his being carried, against his will, away to the place of punishment.’ He adds that ‘the operation of salt is closely allied to that of fire. The fire-baptism is the purification of the saints through the salt of self-denial.’

## Prophetic Dress.

MATTHEW iii. 4 : ‘Now John himself had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins.’

**Question.**—*Does this represent the usual dress of the class of men known as ‘prophets,’ or was it a designed imitation of the great Elijah?*

**Answer.**—This kind of dress is in so striking a way contrasted with our dress, that we naturally think it must have been the badge of a class. It is first necessary to recall to mind the fact, that the Eastern dress usually consisted of a long under-garment, fastened round the loins with a girdle, and an outer cloak or robe, which was readily taken off when work had to be done. The legs and feet were left bare, except for the very light sandal used in walking.

In the towns great attention was paid to dress, and garments were

sold of fine materials, dyed with beautiful colours ; but in the desert districts, and amongst the nomadic tribes, dress was altogether simpler, and was often made from homespun cloth, out of the materials provided by the large flocks of camels or sheep or goats. The characteristic dress of Elijah was not, therefore, so strange or so striking as we too easily imagine it to have been. It was the dress of the people of the wilder part of Gilead, the usual garb of the Arab races, to which he seems in part to have belonged. The shirt, or inner coat, or tunic, was made of the long hair of the camel ; perhaps the expression 'camel's hair' was a recognised trade term for a certain article of merchandise, for we have read of goat's hair or wool as being sold under the name 'camel's hair.' Some idea of the material is obtained by remembering that of it the tent-cloths were made. The leathern girdle was provided from the skin of the animals, and the mantle or cape was, in all probability, a sheep-skin with the wool left on—a kind of dress still worn by the peasants of Palestine.

We are not told of any prophet before Elijah who wore a distinctive set of clothing, and we do not understand that Elisha, in this matter, followed his master's example. But there are indications that, later on, this kind of dress became established as the prophetic garb. The only passage, however, that we can find strictly relevant is Zech. xiii. 4, where reference is made to the prophet, and it is said, as if this were the dress of the order and a sign of the calling, 'Neither shall he wear a rough garment to deceive.' So far as a prophet made a protest for God against the luxuries and extravagances of an age, it might be necessary for him to wear such simple clothing as would itself be a reproach and a testimony ; and from this point of view we can understand the moral and educational value of the distinctive garb of the Society of Friends, or so-called Quakers.

Very much may be said for the view that John the Baptist understood his mission to be to do, for his age, very much what Elijah had done for his ; and that, therefore, Elijah became a model to him. We can also see that his manner of dress and living was in strict accordance with his message. Both Elijah and he had to demand *repentance*. Both had to testify against the luxuries of an over-refined age. Both had to make a striking impression of their separateness from the evils of their age. Both had to be in their own persons 'spectacles,' persons drawing the attention of all men to themselves, in order that attention might be obtained for their message. And in this, sufficient reason may be found for John's

imitation of Elijah, without assuming that the camel's hair tunic, girdle of a strip of hide, and sheep-skin mantle, were the common garb of all Old Testament prophets. No hint is given us that even Jonah had any distinctive dress. *Stanley* tells us that Bedouins or Dervishes, dressed almost precisely as Elijah and John, are still familiar sights in the East.

The view that John's dress was not that of the prophetic class is supported by *Kitto*, who says : 'He was clad in raiment which would wear well, and required no care—such as Elijah and other ancient prophets wore, not as a distinctive of their profession (for John had not yet been called to be a prophet), but as the dress of poor men, and best suited to their condition. It is a dress which may still be seen every day in the Syro-Arabian countries : a rough, but stout and serviceable robe of camel's hair, or of camel's hair and wool combined, bound about the waist by a broad girdle of stiff leather.

### 'Go up Higher.'

LUKE xiv. 10 : 'That when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher : then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

**Question.**—*Does this involve that, in Eastern feastings, the respect in which each guest was held was intimated by the position in which he was placed ?*

**Answer.**—Yes, there was great formality in the arrangements made for feasts. Even in Roman dinner-parties, which were usually composed of nine persons, three reclining on each triclinium, the guest of the evening had the seat of honour, in the centre of the middle triclinium ; the host had the centre of the one side, and the next most honoured guest the centre of the remaining side. Each chief person had his chief friends on the right and left of him.

Two or three illustrations of the Eastern customs may be given. *Schulz* narrates the following incident : 'Towards evening the eldest son of the consul (at Jean d'Acre, the ancient Ptolemais) conducted me to the wedding-feast of a considerable Greek, whose father is a priest, and his brother secretary to the Governor of Galilæa. All the guests who were invited assembled, without distinction, in a saloon, where they were inspected by the master of the ceremonies, and some had to move higher and others lower ; and thus it happened when we came, that two, who had already seated themselves at the top, were obliged to move down lower.

*Mr. Morier*, giving an account of a feast he attended in Persia, says : 'On alighting at the house we were conducted through mean

and obscure passages to a small square court, surrounded by apartments, which were the habitations of the women, who had been dislodged for the occasion; and as we entered into a low room, we there found our host waiting for us, with about a dozen more of his friends. The ambassador from England' (whom Mr. Morier accompanied) 'was placed in the corner of honour, near the window, and his host next to him, on his left hand. The other guests were arranged round the room, according to their respective ranks. When a Persian enters an assembly . . . measuring with his eye the degree of rank to which he holds himself entitled, he straightway wedges himself into the line of guests, without offering any apology for the disturbance which he produces. The master of the entertainment has, however, the privilege of placing anyone as high in the ranks of the assembly as he may choose, and we saw an instance of it on this occasion; for, when the assembly was nearly full, the Governor of Kashan, a man of humble mien, though of considerable rank, came in, and had seated himself at the lowest place, the host, after having testified his particular attentions to him by numerous expressions of welcome, pointed with his hand to an upper seat in the assembly, to which he desired him to move, which he accordingly did.'

With the formality characteristic of the Chinese, their hall of audience and feasting is arranged as a quadrangle, the table along the top, and ranges of seats down the room on each side. The party invited enters, bowing as he advances, and is invited to sit down, which he does by taking the seat at the bottom of the line. He is scarcely seated, however, before he is told, in a peremptory tone, a little softened by the melodious accent of kindness, to 'come up higher.' As soon as he has consented to this new arrangement, the host sits down on the seat immediately below the stranger, and thus awards to him the higher or more honourable place.

## Selection of Sacrifices.

JOHN vi. 27: 'Him hath God the Father sealed.'

**Question.**—*Is there any custom in relation to sacrifices from which this figure of 'sealing' is taken?*

**Answer.**—It was an established custom, in countries contiguous to Judæa, for an appointed officer to examine carefully the various animals presented for sacrifice, which were required to be in good form and healthy condition, and to affix a mark or seal to those of which he was enabled to approve.

There is a passage in *Herodotus*, having reference to the selection of white bulls for sacrifice in Egypt, which affords an effective illustration: 'If they find one black hair on the bull, they deem him unclean. That they may know this with certainty, the priest appointed for this purpose examines the whole animal, both standing up and lying down. If, after this search, the animal is found without blemish, he signifies it by binding a label to his horns; then, applying wax, he seals it with his ring, and the beast is led away. To sacrifice one not thus sealed is deemed a capital crime.'

It is not precisely known in what form the Jewish officer attested the suitability of a victim for sacrifice, but whatever mark was placed upon it would take the form of a seal, as something separating it for Divine use. In this sense our Lord was attested, and set apart for sacrifice, by God the Father. This association of the passage affords a richer meaning than the more common idea of affixing a seal to a legal document.

### Bringing Sick Folk to the Hakim.

MATTHEW iv. 24: 'And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people . . . and he healed them.'

**Question.**—*Was the excitement produced by the healing power of Jesus altogether new, or was this the usual Eastern way of seeking the help of skilful doctors?*

**Answer.**—There is good reason for thinking that our Lord arrested public attention mainly as a skilful physician. It would not strike them that His methods of cure were so novel as they appear to us. There was often as little apparent connection between the remedies used by their Hakims (physicians) and the cures they effected, as they could discern between the formulæ or actions of Jesus, and the results that followed. The main purpose of our Lord's miracles of healing, so far as the people were concerned, was to draw attention to Himself and to His message; to prepare open and grateful hearts in which the seed of His truth might find good soil.

So far as we can learn the methods of the physicians in the time of Christ, we understand that there were no doctors resident in the towns, as with us, to whom applications had to be made in cases of need; but men at times rose up, having, or professing to have, some 'specific' for a certain class of disease, a specific medicine, or a specific treatment. Such a man would take the title of Hakim, and journey about the country, everywhere having crowds of people

gathering round him, bringing their sick folk to the healer. The Eastern doctor, indeed, is best represented by the vendor of patent medicines in our market-places. Tidings of a few successful cures would run swiftly through a wide district, and make a man's fame quickly.

Our Lord worked in the lines of the public customs and sentiments of His age. His supreme aim was moral teaching ; His means for securing an audience were the interest awakened in one who could heal bodily diseases. And *He could*. He was the true power of God ; and, for that very reason, aroused an amount of public attention, which the mere mountebank, and even the judicious doctor, could not hope to command.

Here, also, the common customs of Eastern lands differ so materially from those with which we are familiar, that the incidents of our Lord's life seem to us more extraordinary than they could have appeared to them among whom He lived. Eastern customs steadfastly abide, and we give two descriptions of the way in which Hakims are treated at the present day.

*Dean Stanley* tells us : ' It was after a walk through the village of Ehden, beneath the mountain of the cedars, our last Syrian expedition, in which we visited several of the churches and cottages of the place, that we found the stairs and corridors of the castle of the Maronite chief, Sheikh Joseph, lined with a crowd of eager applicants, "sick people taken with divers diseases," who, hearing that there was a medical man in the party, had thronged round him, "beseeching him that he would heal them." I mention this incident because it illustrates so forcibly those scenes in the Gospel history, from which I have almost of necessity borrowed the language best fitted to express the eagerness, the hope, the anxiety of the multitude who had been attracted by the fame of his benevolent influence.'

And *Gadsby* says : ' When Dr. Richardson was in Jerusalem, crowds of invalids, the halt, the blind, the lame, the sick of every description, collected from all quarters around him, so that he found it impossible to satisfy their demands. The patients seized upon him, as if only he stood between them and death. They fell down before him, grasped his legs, and kissed his feet, and supplicated him, in the most earnest manner, to prescribe for their complaints. Whether he was in his lodgings, or walked the streets, or sat down in the market-place, he was equally beset. No sooner had he prescribed for one, than another victim of disease pathetically assailed him, and kept him in constant employment. They, indeed, hunted him over town and country.'

## The Evil of Divorcements.

MATTHEW xix. 7: 'They say unto Him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away.'

**Difficulty.**—*Usually our Lord thoroughly supported Mosaic teachings and institutions, what was there in this case, or in the customs of His age, which led Him thus to oppose the Mosaic regulation, or permission?*

**Explanation.**—If a permission is abused, it may properly be withdrawn. There are conditions which make it better that even the sacred marriage-bond should be severed. Strictly for such conditions the Mosaic system provided. When formal religion took the place of spiritual religion, the Rabbins busied themselves with elaborating the conditions on which divorce could be allowed, until most false impressions came to prevail in relation to the sanctity of the marriage-tie; and our Lord, whose life-work was to restore spiritual religion, was compelled to sweep away all conditions of divorce, both Rabbinical and Mosaic, in order that He might set men face to face with the primary law of the relations of the sexes to each other. He swept away the good limitation along with the evil additions, when He found that the reasonable limitation was thus shamefully abused.

The Divine idea is that, upon the basis of a pure mutual affection, two lives, that of the man and the woman, should be so intimately blended, that the two should have one purpose, one endeavour, be in effect one flesh.

But as soon as men became what is called 'civilized,' marriage was made an instrument for securing self-seeking ends. The sexes were brought into life-association on other terms than mutual affection; and, inevitably, there came repulsions from one another out of the experience of the married state, and a whole host of moral evils as the consequence of such repulsions. The laws of civilized society must put the consequences under regulation, and arrange the conditions on which those once 'joined together' may be 'put asunder.

Rabbinism seems to have cared neither for morals nor religion in its endeavours to secure its sectarian ends; and one of the worst things it secured was a most perilous freedom of divorce, which tended to destroy the family life, and to open a wide door for social immoralities. A society can only keep pure by maintaining strict marriage laws, giving right of divorcement only in cases of adultery, and possibly also of personal cruelty.

Some idea of the shamefully loose character of Pharisaic teachings on this subject may be obtained from the following passage: 'The Rabbis say, "If anyone see a woman handsomer than his wife, he

may dismiss his wife and marry that woman." Even the strict Schammai held that if a wife went out without being shrouded in the veil which Eastern women still wear, she might be divorced ; and hence many Rabbis locked up their wives when they went out. While some held that divorce should be lawful only for adultery, others, like Josephus, claimed the right to send away their wives if they were not pleased with their behaviour. The school of Hillel even maintained that if a wife cooked her husband's food badly, by over-salting or over-roasting it, he might put her away ; and he might also do so if she were stricken by any grievous bodily affliction. The facility of divorce among the Jews had, indeed, become so great a scandal, even among their heathen neighbours, that the Rabbis were fain to boast of it as a privilege granted to Israel, but not to other nations.'—*Geikie*.

Allen, in his *Modern Judaism*, tells us that 'Divorce is still very common among the Eastern Jews ; in 1856 there were *sixteen cases* among the small Jewish population of Jerusalem. In fact, a Jew may divorce his wife at any time or from any cause, he being himself the sole judge ; the only hindrance is that, to prevent divorces in a mere sudden fit of spleen, the bill of divorce must have the concurrence of three Rabbis, and be written on ruled vellum, containing neither more nor less than twelve lines ; and it must be given in the presence of ten witnesses.'

Our readers will be interested in the following specimen of a modern bill of divorcement :

'On the fourth day of the week, on the eleventh day of the month Chisleu, in the year five thousand four hundred and fifty-four from the creation of the world ; according to the computation which we follow here in the city of Amsterdam, which is called *Amstelredam* ; situated by the side of the sea called Taya, and by the river Amstel. I, Abraham, the son of Benjamin, surnamed Wolff, the priest ; and at this time dwelling in the city of Amsterdam, which is called *Amstelredam*, which is situated by the seaside called Taya, and by the river Amstel ; or if I have any other name, or surname, or my parents, or my place, or the place of my parents ; by my own free-will, without any compulsion, do put away, dismiss, and divorce thee, my wife Rebekah, the daughter of Jonah the Levite ; who at this time resides in the city of Amsterdam, called *Amstelredam*, situated by the seaside called Taya, and by the river Amstel ; or if thou hast any other name, or surname, or thy parents, or thy place, or the place of thy parents : Who wast heretofore my wife ; but now I put thee away, dismiss, and divorce

thee ; so that from this time thou art in thine own power, and art at thine own disposal, and mayest be married to any other man, whom thou pleasest ; and let no man hinder thee in my name, from this day forward, and for ever ; and lo, thou art free to any man. Let this be to thee, from me, a bill of divorce, an instrument of dismission, and a letter of separation, according to the law of Moses and Israel.

‘SEALTIEL, the son of Paltiel, witness.

‘CALONYMUS, the son of Gabriel, witness.’

*Van Lennep*, writing of life in Western Asia, forcibly illustrates the evils of loose notions respecting divorce : ‘As a matter of fact, the actual cause of divorce is not adultery, a crime punishable with death when detected, which, however, rarely occurs. The usual causes of divorce are a bad temper or extravagance in the wife, and the cruel treatment or neglect of the husband. As the latter is not obliged to pay the wife’s dowry when *she* sues for divorce, he often treats her so badly as to compel her to appeal to the judge for deliverance. We have known a man, not forty years of age, who had successively married and put away a dozen wives, having devoured the substance of each in turn, and compelled her to seek a divorce on the ground of utter neglect.’

Count Tolstoi, in his remarkable work, *What I believe*, says : ‘I came to understand the full meaning of Christ’s words, and saw that God had created man and woman in order that they might live in couples, and that what God had joined together should never be put asunder. I now see clearly that monogamy is the natural law of mankind, and must never be broken. I understand the words “he who divorces his wife,” that is, the woman to whom he was first united, “forces her to commit adultery,” and brings new evil into the world. I consider as alone sacred and obligatory that union which, once and for ever, binds a man to the first woman he loves.’

## Love-Feasts in the Early Church.

ACTS ii. 42 : ‘And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.’

**Question.**—*What relation may we suppose this ‘breaking of bread’ to have borne to the observance of the Lord’s Supper?*

**Answer.**—A study of the literature of this subject leaves the impression that there is very little actual information on which we can rely, and that we are almost dependent on reasonable or unreasonable suppositions. What seems to be quite clear is, that

Eastern communities, united by some philosophical, or social, or religious bonds, are accustomed to take their common daily meal together, one meal usually sufficing in Eastern countries. Such was the custom of the Essenes; and, in later times, of monks and religious sects. The men of Sparta were provided with a daily public meal, at the national expense. And further illustrations may be found in the habits of the Mendicant Friars, the Apostolici, and the Waldenses in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Our Lord and his band of Apostles no doubt took their daily meal together; and, in the times of the great feasts, it was usual for the companies coming up from the country to share together the daily provision.

The expression 'breaking of bread' would not, standing by itself, even suggest the Lord's Supper. It was the common expression for an ordinary meal, and became such from the double fact that Eastern bread is always broken by hand, and not cut with the knife; and that the head of the family, immediately after the saying of grace, commenced the meal by the act of breaking a piece, or cake, of bread. So far then as the expression, as used in the above passage, goes, we are simply to understand by it that the new converts shared in the daily meal of the apostolic company, which was enlarged to meet the new and increased demands.

Such meals would, however, bear a solemn religious character, and it is in no way unreasonable to assume that the one chief association of them, in the minds of the apostles, would be the last meal they had with Christ, on the night of His arrest. That association would give tone to the conversation at such daily meals, and it would gradually become fixed, so that it would be understood, by the president, that it was his duty to bring the solemn scene of the great Supper-night, and its hallowed teachings, before the minds of the assembled company. We can even understand that, gradually, the custom grew of actually imitating that act of Christ, in what we know as the institution of the Supper. This is, probably, the genesis of the Christian feast, which we now observe.

Whatever form this 'ordinance,' or 'sacrament,' took, it is almost universally admitted that, at first, it was a part—probably the closing part—of the ordinary evening meal, or 'supper,' as it was called. This is indeed clearly involved in the perils of self-indulgence which St. Paul so forcibly deals with in 1 Cor. xi. How the Lord's Supper came to be separated from the daily meal we are left to imagine; but, from the religious point of view, this was the only part of the feast specially worth preserving, as having a worshipping and educa-

tive character : and so, when changes of social life made daily eating together unadvisable or impossible, the remembrance of Christ with the aid of the emblems of bread and wine was retained, and made a distinct part of public Christian service.

There are no descriptions of these daily eatings together, as they were presided over by the Apostles, and we have no reason for thinking that they differed in general form from the united meals of other communities at this period. We have descriptions of the methods of observance in the time of the successors of the Apostles, but, in considering them, we must make careful allowance for the tendency to establish ceremonials, and get the free Christian life fixed in precise and formal moulds.

We are told that the Christians of a given town or district came together on a fixed day, probably the first day of the week, in some large room, either hired, or lent by some wealthy Christian. The materials of the meal varied according to the feeling or wealth of the society. Bread and wine were essential, because used in that more solemn commemorative act which came at some period in the service. But they provided also meat, poultry, cheese, milk, and honey ; and early paintings in the catacombs of Rome indicate that fish was also used. If the feast was of this kind we can well understand how gluttony and drunkenness became associated with it, and called forth the indignant reproaches of the Apostle Paul. The cost of the meal fell chiefly on the richer members of the church ; but it is probable that each person was expected to bring his contribution in money or in food. The women and men were seated at different tables, perhaps on opposite sides of the room, and all waited until the presbyter or bishop pronounced the blessing. Then they ate and drank. At some time during the meal, one loaf was passed round, and one cup, the cup of blessing, and of these all partook. Then they washed their hands, and the more devotional part of the evening began. Reports from district churches were read, those who had gifts expounded, collections were made for the poor, and with the kiss of charity the evening closed. Such meetings were designed to be a witness and bond of the common brotherhood of Christians.

It is certainly a most strange thing that no commands in relation to the Lord's Supper are given by any apostle, and that the reproof of St. Paul is the only reference made in the New Testament to it. No mention is made of it by the Apostolical fathers, Barnabas, Polycarp, or Clement of Rome. Ignatius, in a doubtful passage, make some very vague and uncertain allusions to it. Justin Martyr (A.D. 148) gives two descriptions in nearly identical words. 'On

Sundays we all assemble in one place, both those who live in the city and they who dwell in the country, and the writings of apostles and prophets are read so long as the time permits. When the reader stops, the president of the assembly makes an address, in which he recapitulates the glorious things that have been read, and exhorts the people to follow them. Then we all stand up together and pray. After prayer, bread, wine, and water are brought in. The president of the meeting again prays according to his ability, and gives thanks, to which the people respond "Amen." After this, the bread, wine, and water are distributed to those present, and the deacons carry portions to such as are necessarily detained from the meeting. Those who are able and willing contribute what they please in money, which is given to the president of the meeting, and is appropriated to the support of widows and orphans, the sick, the poor, and whomsoever is necessitous.'

*Dean Plumptre* says that 'in proportion as the society became larger, and the sense of brotherhood less living, the old social distinctions would tend to re-assert themselves. The agapæ would become either mere social entertainments for the wealthy, as at Alexandria, or a mere dole of food for the poor, as in Western Africa, and in either case would lose their original significance. Other causes tended also to throw them into the background. When Christians came to have special buildings set apart for worship, and to look on them with something of the same local reverence that the Jews had had for the Temple, they shrank from sitting down in them to a common meal as an act of profanation. The agapæ were, therefore, gradually forbidden to be held in churches, as by the Council of Laodicea, that of third Carthage (A.D. 391), and that of Trullo (A.D. 692).' The feast of love was finally separated from the Eucharist, which, by the Council of third Carthage, was required to be received fasting.

## Selling Debtors.

MATTHEW xviii. 25: 'But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.'

**Question.**—*May not an argument be drawn from our Lord's reference to slavery in favour of that domestic institution?*

**Answer.**—It is necessary to distinguish carefully between slavery, or compelled personal service, in Eastern countries, and the slavery which properly aroused the indignation of our fathers, as practised in

the West Indies and America. Our Western idea, that man ought never to be treated as property, seems very strange to the Eastern mind, which is familiar with the tribal idea, which treats all the members of the tribe as the absolute property of the chief. It may also be remembered that Easterns do not punish by perpetual imprisonment, as our fathers did, for debt, or by penal servitude, as we do for crime. To sell a person, and even his family, which was dependent on him, along with him for debt, was a more hopeful way of punishing him by restricting his liberty, than our method of committing to the dreadful associations of a Fleet prison. A man who proved himself unable to manage money was wisely sentenced to work all the rest of his life for another.

We do not, therefore, confuse things that differ. To use force against a weaker race, rudely seize them from their homes, cruelly ill-treat them, carry them away to foreign lands, sell them for profit, and drive them to work with the lash, is all so utterly abominable that one wonders how honourable men could ever have argued in favour of such practices and such institutions. But to restrict a man's liberty when it is proved that he does not know how to use it ; to compel him to serve another when it is plain that he could not serve himself, has only in it so much of degradation as is necessary to constitute it a punishment.

It may even be fairly argued, in favour of ancient and Eastern institutions, that as there are *individuals* who are incapable of self-management, and are best in the bondage and direction of personal service, so there may be *races* which can develop better under conditions of so-called slavery, than with the full trust of individual liberty. But it is extremely difficult to persuade Western peoples that the extreme demand which they make for personal freedom rests upon a very local and circumscribed sentiment. Abraham's followers never wanted to be free, because such slavery as they knew was no irksome relationship.

Our Lord had no commission to alter the existing conditions of society, and He therefore spoke in the terms familiar to His age. We must clearly see that He referred to the slavery which He knew of, and not to the slavery which has disgraced the later Christian centuries.

It may be noted that, in the case of slavery in payment of debt, the debtor would have the chance of working out his debt, and so recovering his personal freedom. This is an important mitigation of the punishment and degradation. At least in the earlier times the Year of Jubilee brought all slave-times to an end.

## Who were the Herodians ?

MARK iii. 6 : 'And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand by this term a distinct sect, or is it another name for a well-known party? And in any case, what could be the ground of their enmity against Christ?*

**Answer.**—Very little positive information is at hand concerning this party or sect, which seems to have been political rather than religious, and to have united with the Jewish sects only on the ground of a common animosity to one who claimed to be the Messiah.

Among a great many suppositions as to who or what they might have been, one little piece of historical fact appears, which is narrated by *Dean Plumptre*. He says that certain Jewish writers give the origin of the Herodian sect thus : 'In the early days of Herod the Great, when Hillel the great scribe was at the height of his fame, he had as his colleague Menahem, possibly the son of the Essene of that name, of whom Josephus tells us that he prophesied Herod's future greatness, and, it may be, the father of the Manaen of Acts xiii. 1. This Menahem was tempted by the king's growing power, and, with eighty followers, entered into his service, forsook the ranks of the Pharisees, and appeared in gorgeous apparel glittering with gold.' If this man was the founder of the party, by this act, we can well understand what were its leading principles.

*Tertullian* and others say that they took their name from believing Herod to be the Messiah, who was to raise the country to the highest pitch of glory. We may be sure that they were strongly attached to the family and rule of Herod ; and, by consequence, very zealous for the authority of the Romans, and the introduction of Roman manners, games, and other heathen usages. Their desire to fully re-establish the Herodian kingdom set them in deadly enmity against Christ, who claimed to set up a *new* kingdom. *Farrar* thinks that these Herodians were, on their religious side, mostly Sadducees ; and he inclines to identify them with the *Boethusim*, a party who were identified with Herod the Great, by marriage (through Mariamne, daughter of Simon, who was son of a certain Boethus of Alexandria), and by worldly interests.

If we try to estimate the political movements of the age, we shall see that there were probably many who saw 'in the power of the Herodian family the pledge of the preservation of their national existence in the face of Roman ambition. In proportion as they regarded the independent nationality of the Jewish people as the

first condition of the fulfilment of its future destiny, they would be willing to acquiesce in the dominion of men who were themselves of foreign descent, and not rigid in the observance of the Mosaic ritual. Two distinct classes might thus unite in supporting what was a domestic tyranny as contrasted with an absolute dependence on Rome, those who saw in the Herods a protection against direct heathen rule, which was the one object of their fear; and those who were inclined to look with satisfaction upon such a compromise between the ancient faith and heathen civilization, as Herod the Great and his successors had endeavoured to realize, as the true and highest consummation of Jewish hopes. On the one side the Herodians—partisans of Herod in the widest sense of the term—were thus brought into union with the Pharisees; on the other with the Sadducees. Yet there is no reason to suppose that they endeavoured to form any very systematic harmony of the conflicting doctrines of the two sects, but rather the conflicting doctrines themselves were thrown into the background by what appeared to be a paramount political necessity. Such coalitions have been frequent in every age; and the rarity of the allusions to the Herodians as a marked body, seems to show that this, like similar coalitions, had no enduring influence as the foundation of party.'—*Westcott*.

## Old Testament Baptizings.

MATTHEW iii. 6: 'And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.'

**Question.**—*Whence did John get the idea of associating this rite with his preaching?*

**Answer.**—The assertion made by John himself, and recorded by the Evangelist John, 'And I knew him not, *but he that sent me to baptize with water*, the same said unto me,' etc., can only mean that he claimed to have received instructions direct from God in relation to the matter. And this is the only satisfactory explanation. If we recognise in John a prophet, that is, a man in direct communication with God, receiving instructions immediately from heaven for the ordering of his life-work, then it is not difficult to understand that his characteristic rite, as well as his characteristic message, were given him from above. It may be freely admitted that, in later Judaism, there had grown up associations with sprinklings, or baptizings, which prepared the way for a ready understanding of John's rite, but it and its meaning were subjects of special revelation, and needed to be explained to the people.

It is asserted that previous to the time of John proselytes to

Judaism were admitted by the ceremony of baptism, the water representing the dividing line between the two religions: but John's demand was not of any change of religion, but of repentance, as a moral preparation for a special Divine revelation, which was close at hand. It would be more hopeful to study the rite of baptism in its association with repentance; and as the sign, or outward expression, of the state or attitude of the repentant mind. In teaching the duty of repentance, it is of supreme importance that it should be made quite clear to every mind, that it is no mere good sentiment, it must be accompanied by an actual putting away of evil. Exactly this was enforced by the rite of baptism, which said, 'You must put away your wrong-doings, wash them all right away, as you wash the filth of the body by bathing. Your immersion then is, the outward and visible sign that you not only feel sorry for sin, but do actually, with holy resolve and effort, put it away from you.' In this view the associations of John's rite are the simple and natural associations of the bath; and it does not seem necessary to go beyond these. The *voice* of his rite John uttered when he said, 'Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.'

While, however, this satisfies us, it may be well to examine what can be said in favour of a much more strictly ritual significance. So far as the Mosaic system, in its original form, is concerned, the washings of priests, or of healed persons, signified only the putting away of *external sin*, sin as a stain on conduct and relations. In earlier Judaism lustrations have nothing to do with changed opinions or new religions. And it is certainly more probable that John would carry on the original Mosaic teachings than any of the sentiments and extravagances which grew up under a decayed Rabbinism.

It can only be said there is reason to believe that a baptism of proselytes was practised prior to the advent of Christ. Some argue indeed that it was a custom introduced after Christ's time; and *Dean Alford* only ventures to assert that 'the baptism or lustration of a proselyte on admission would follow as a matter of course, by analogy, from the constant legal practice of lustration after all uncleannesses; and it is difficult to imagine a time when it would not be of use.' But this looks very like determining beforehand what *ought* to be the explanation of the rite, and then seeking for indications and proofs of the position resolved upon. It does not appear that John's baptism had anything whatever to do with proselytes. He was a moral preparer of the ways; and his rite was strictly a part of his 'preparing' work. *Olshausen* suggestively says, 'It was a baptism of *repentance*, not a laver of *regeneration*.'

*Pressensé* may be cited as supporting, in general, the view of John's baptism which we have commended as most reasonable. He says : 'The rite of baptism is the summary of John's preaching, and of his whole ministry, at least when it is restored to its true meaning, and is not regarded according to the thoroughly Pharisaic interpretation of the historian Josephus, as setting forth the self-purification of the soul. The originality of John's baptism is unjustly disputed, on the ground that it was identical with the baptism of proselytes. It is first very doubtful whether this ceremony was in use at this period ; then John expressly combated the exaggerated idea entertained of the privilege of belonging to the holy nation. The rite which he instituted connects itself with the ablutions so much observed in the religion of Moses ; but it extends their significance by substituting the idea of moral purification for that which is merely ritual. With him the question is not of such or such a special defilement, but of that general corruption which has befallen human nature, and which calls for a powerful and new manifestation of Divine love. Thus his baptism represents present penitence and coming deliverance : it is the true sacrament of this era of preparation, the condensed utterance of which is a cry of grief and hope, taking the form of a prayer of penitence and trust. The later prophets had declared that the times of Messiah would be marked by the purification of hearts. 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean,' we read in Ezekiel. 'There shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,' says Zechariah. Evidently the baptism of John only translated into an impressive ceremonial these symbolical words. If for ablutions he has substituted immersion, it is the better to represent the gravity of the disease which was to be healed."

We find, then, the proper anticipations of John's rite (1) in the general Eastern associations of washing with water. 'Ablution in the East is almost a religious duty. The dust and heat weigh upon the spirits and heart like a load ; its removal is refreshment and happiness. It was, hence, impossible to see a convert go down into a stream, travel-worn and soiled with dust, and, after disappearing for a moment, emerge pure and fresh, without feeling that the symbol suited and interpreted a strong craving of the human heart'. (2) The Tabernacle and Temple practised constant ablutions, and others were required daily from the people at large, to remove ceremonial impurity. And (3) in the figurative expressions used by the later prophets. David had prayed, 'Wash me from mine iniquity.' And Isaiah had cried, 'Wash ye, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings.'

## Washing Saints' Feet.

1 TIMOTHY v. 10: 'If she hath washed the saints' feet.'

**Question.**—*Can this refer to some ritual practice which had been early established, or does it allude only to the usual kindly and familiar attentions to guests in Eastern households?*

**Answer.**—It is merely a general expression for 'showing kindly hospitality,' and there is nothing whatever of a ritual or ceremonial character about it. One familiar and necessary act of hospitality is mentioned as representing all that is included in kindly attention to guests and strangers. Washing the feet was regarded as a specially grateful act, by those who wore sandals for journeying, but threw them off, and stepped on carpets and mats with bare feet.

'To this day, in some parts of Syria, the custom exists of washing a visitor's feet, to show to him that he is welcome. Buckingham states that he once stopped at the house of a widow in Arabia, and that she insisted upon washing his feet; and Jowett, when in Syria, received the like attention from a servant, by direction of his master. The earliest records we have of this custom are in Gen. xviii. 4, xix. 2. If a man should call at a house in the parts referred to, and no water should be brought for his feet, it would be a sign that he was not welcome. Now we read in Timothy that a widow was not to be admitted into the primitive Church unless she had washed the saints' feet; that is, unless she could prove her attachment to the cause of Christ by having hospitably entertained His travelling disciples—having "lodged strangers," and having made known to them that they were welcome in the usual way; for all the early saints were travelling, wayfaring men.'

## Sweat like Blood.

LUKE xxii. 44: 'And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Does this mean that they actually were blood-drops that fell from Him, or only that they were large, thick, heavy drops, like drops of blood?*

**Answer.**—Two things at once invite attention. (1) The fact of the sweat taking a peculiar character is only noticed by the Evangelist Luke. If it had been real blood, the apostles must all have observed the blood-stains on our Lord's garments. (2) St. Luke carefully states that the *form* of them was like blood-drops; he does

not assert anything concerning the *substance* of them. It seems then to be quite an over-straining of his language to make out that the sweat was actual blood.

It may be freely admitted that sufficient instances of bloody discharge from the skin, under pressure of extreme excitement, have been furnished by Dr. Stroud and others, to assure the possibility of such an explanation of Luke's narrative. We only say, that such scientific elucidations are not necessary, for Luke's words are quite simple and natural, and adequate to the occasion. Being a physician, he readily found a medical simile, and likened the big drops of sweat to the great thick drops of blood which he must often have seen. We do not desire to separate our Lord's experience from that which is quite ordinarily human.

*Dean Plumptre* evidently inclines to this view, though he hesitates about distinctly stating it. 'The phenomenon described is obviously one which would have a special interest for one of Luke's calling, and the four words which he uses for "agony," "drops," "sweat," "more earnestly" (lit., more intensely), though not exclusively technical, are yet such as a medical writer would naturally use. They do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. The form of the expression, "*as it were*, great drops (better *clots*) of blood," leaves us uncertain, as the same Greek word does in "descending *like* a dove," in Matt. iii. 16, whether it applies to manner or to visible appearance. On the latter, and generally received view, the phenomenon is not unparalleled, both in ancient and modern times.'

The chief authorities for the view that the term refers to the great size and thickness of the drops that fell, are Euthymius, Theophylact, Kuinoël, Olshausen; and for the view that they were drops of actual blood, Calvin, Bengel, Meyer, De Wette, Godet, Oosterzee, Alford, etc.

*Farrar* curiously allows himself to use expressions which suit either of the theories. He says: 'The great drops of anguish which drop from Him in the deathful struggle *look to them* like heavy goutts of blood.' And then, a few lines below, he says: 'Whence came all this agonized failing of heart . . . which forced from Him the rare and intense phenomenon of a *blood-stained sweat*?'

The view which we approve is, that large drops of sweat from our Lord's face fell, and attracted the attention of the disciples; in narrating the striking fact they had noticed, they produced such an impression of the unusual intensity of the discharge, that St. Luke found the only fitting simile with which to describe it, in the thick and heavy drops of blood.

## Praying in the Streets.

MATTHEW vi. 5 : 'They love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.'

**Question.**—*Must we regard our Lord's words as literally descriptive of prevailing habits, or are they a figurative representation of formality and self-seeking in prayer?*

**Answer.**—We can hardly doubt that the exaggerated claim of the Pharisees to a peculiar sanctity found expression in public acts and attitudes of devotion. They sought the 'praise of men,' and would not scruple at any methods for attracting public attention. If our religion be of the heart, then it is enough to be assured that He who seeth in secret knows all about it ; but if a man's religion be a round of forms and ceremonies, then he will be sure to want somebody—some fellow-men—to look on and admire ; and he will soon come, more or less consciously, to adjust and arrange his doings so as to win men's admiration.

The mistaken forms which a merely ceremonial Eastern religion may take is well illustrated in the Moslem practices of the present day. The 'namaz,' or daily prayer, is recited, as nearly as convenient, at sunrise, noon, three o'clock in the afternoon, at sunset, and an hour and a half later, which is called bed-time. The Moslem may pray anywhere, in any place where the prayer-time may find him ; and the more ostentatious the place the greater the merit of the prayings. 'To obtain a reputation for sanctity, they often make long prayer, using vain repetitions. It is evident that their minds are little engaged in these exercises, for they look around, salute a friend, or tell a person that they will give him some desired information as soon as they get through.'

*Van Lennep* tells us that 'Orientals are very particular in selecting the spot on which they pray ; it must not have been used for unclean purposes, nor in any way have been defiled. Hence Muslims never pray in a sleeping apartment or closet, but in an open hall, garden, or on a house-top. They never kneel upon the bare ground, if they can help it, but spread a cloth or rug, upon which they perform their devotions, after removing their shoes.'

It is said by those who describe the prevailing customs of our Lord's time, that a rigid Pharisee prayed many times a day, and too many took care to have the hours of prayer overtake them, decked in their broad phylacteries, at the street corners, that they might publicly show their devoutness. But it is not necessary to force our

Lord's words to bear a precisely descriptive application. The moral teacher, who seeks to correct the common evils of an age, is bound to make them 'loom large.' He becomes effective by adding a certain 'humour' to his description. If we were referring only to human teachers, we should say that they even gain effect by using the instrumentality of 'satire' and 'caricature.' We prefer, therefore, to regard the expression of the above passage as so far descriptive, that such praying in the streets might occasionally be seen, but as mainly figurative, designed to show up the evil of formality and self-seeking in so purely religious a matter as prayer.

### Gifts of Festal Garments.

MATTHEW xxii. 11: 'And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.'

**Difficulty.**—*The punishment was very severe for what seems to us a mere slight. Can it be that local customs alter our estimate of the man's conduct.*

**Explanation.**—Though it cannot be proved to have been a common custom in ordinary society, there are many illustrations of the fact that kings provided suitable garments for their guests, and required them to wear such garments while in their presence. *Trench*, in his work on the 'Parables,' gives several instances. Wardrobes filled with many thousand garments formed part of the wealth of every Eastern prince, and it was part of his glory to bring them out for use on state occasions. We have met with another illustration. 'Every guest invited to the wedding at the royal marriage of Sultan Mahmoud, a few years ago, had made expressly for him, at the expense of the Sultan, a wedding-garment. No one, however dignified by his station, was permitted to enter into the presence-chamber of that sovereign without a change of raiment. This was formerly the universal custom in the East. But, inasmuch as these garments were very costly, and some of the guests invited might plead poverty, and thus appear unclad in the guest-chamber of the king, the cost was defrayed at Sultan Mahmoud's expense. To each guest was presented a suit of wedding-garments.'

The figures used to describe the punishment of this false friend, this presumptuous, conceited, self-willed guest, only present in a poetical way the simple fact that he was turned out of the warm and light guest-chamber into the night and the cold, and left to go shivering home. In this view his punishment was exactly appropriate to the sin of his insolent slighting of the feelings and wishes of one who was offering him kindly hospitalities.

*Farrar* states the case in a few suggestive sentences : 'Others are invited ; the wedding-feast is furnished with guests both good and bad ; the king comes in and notices one who had thrust himself into the company in his own rags, without providing or accepting the wedding-garment, which the commonest courtesy required. This rude, intruding, presumptuous guest is cast forth by attendant angels into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

## Fasting Customs.

MATTHEW vi. 16 : 'Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.'

**Difficulty.**—*Seeing that fasting is no part of Mosaic injunctions, how did it come to be such a common religious custom?*

**Explanation.**—It is certainly the fact, and it is a very striking fact, that no examples of fasting occur before the time of Moses ; and no regulations in relation to fasting were made by Moses. The only thing that can be forced to bear such a reference is the requirement for the solemn day of expiation : 'On the tenth day of this seventh month, ye shall afflict your souls' (Lev. xxiii. 27, 29). It is argued that this 'affliction of the soul' must have been accompanied with abstinence from eating ; because people in trouble lose appetite.

The earliest Bible reference to fasting is found in Judges xx. 26 ; and a careful study of Old Testament passages bearing upon it, will probably leave the impression that it was rather a *national* than a religious custom, and one bearing its proper relation to outward and temporal troubles rather than to soul-humiliations.

The religious character of fasting seems to have grown out of the national fastings which the Jews established during the Captivity. They observed four annual fasts, in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months. Weekly fasts were established some time later than the Captivity. They were observed on the second and fifth days of the week, and may have been associated with the troublous times of the Maccabees.

Rabbinism developed national fasting into a religious ordinance, and made it a bondage ; a burden beyond men's power to bear. The spirit of priesthood, which claims the guidance of men's consciences and lives, must work through minute and multiplied requirements ; and is sure to delight in schemes which put men's bodies and bodily habits under painful restraints. Fasting is one of the

most effective instruments for the purposes of Rabbinism and Priestism ; and in this way the evil custom became established. So far as we can understand the New Testament teaching, no man is required to fast ; but everyone is at liberty to fast. It is no matter of religious duty ; it may be a matter of pious feeling, of personal impulse. If any man finds fasting to be helpful to his religious culture, let him fast ; but do not let him lay his customs as bondages, or even as models, on his fellow-worshippers. What Christ urges is simply this : ‘ If you do fast, be true in it ; be modest in it ; be reticent in it ; fast for God only to know about ; beware of fasting just to get the praise of men.’

The extravagancies and insincerities against which our Lord protested are well indicated by *Geikie* : ‘ When fasting, the Pharisees strewed their heads with ashes, and neither washed nor anointed themselves, nor trimmed their beards, but put on wretched clothing, and showed themselves in all the outward signs of mourning and sadness used for the dead. Insincerity made capital of feigned humiliation and contrition, till even the Roman theatre noticed it. In one of the plays of the time, a camel, covered with a mourning cloth, was led on the stage. “ Why is the camel in mourning ? ” asked one of the players. “ Because the Jews are keeping the Sabbath-year, and grow nothing, but are living on thistles. The camel is mourning because its food is thus taken from it.” Rabbis were forbidden to anoint themselves before going out, and it was recorded of a specially famous doctor, that his face was always black with fasting.

## All Things Common.

ACTS ii. 44 : ‘ And all that believed were together, and had all things common.’

**Question.**—*What limitations ought we to put on this as a description of the daily life of the early disciples ?*

**Answer.**—Great mistakes are made by attempting to explain Eastern customs in the light of Western ideas. We bring to this passage our knowledge of wild and visionary schemes for securing among men a community of goods, and then assume that it was *such* a scheme that the apostles and the Early Church attempted to work out. In the East large and mixed families are accustomed to dwell together, sharing the common property of the family. Even as many as sixty to one hundred persons are reported to reside in one house. The idea of a separate dwelling for each distinct family is quite a Western notion. So we may understand that providing daily food

for a very large accession to the apostolic family was no very overwhelming matter.

But the fact is, that St. Luke's very simple and natural language has been forced to mean too much : and two statements of his have been set together, though they have no necessary relations. He says, 'they had all things common,' which simply means that they took their daily meals together, instead of in their separate houses. And he presently says, they 'sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need :' which has been read as if it were, 'and every member sold all his possessions and goods, put the proceeds into a common fund, from which the general needs were supplied ;' whereas the natural and common-sense meaning is 'those who had possessions and goods sold out so as to be enabled to replenish the stores from which the daily food, and the supply of special necessities, was provided.'

A note in the *Speaker's Commentary* puts, succinctly and forcibly, the reasonable limitations under which St. Luke's expressions ought to be placed. 'The apostles may have thought that they were following Christ's example in having some common fund on a larger scale than that with which they had been familiar while they were in personal attendance upon Him (Luke viii. 3 ; John xii. 6 ; xiii. 29). There was no community of goods 'as touching the right, title, and possession of the same,' absolutely and universally enforced, as a necessary and permanent arrangement of the Church. This is plain from Acts v. 4 ; from the scope for the alms deeds of Dorcas, ix. 36 ; from Mary, the mother of Mark, retaining her house, xii. 12 ; from Mnason's ability to provide lodgings, xxi. 16 ; from the Hebrew Christians having property of which they could be despoiled, Heb. x. 34 ; xiii. 2, 5, 16 ; from the exhortations to almsgiving and to the distinct duties of rich and poor in the Epistles generally ; and from the recommendation to the Corinthians in particular (1 Cor. xvi. 2), that everyone should lay by on the first day of the week as God had prospered him. (Comp. Rom. xv. 26 ; 1 John iii. 17.) The estimate of comparative needs recognised in the next verse shows that property was not alienated beyond control. Whatever was done was spontaneous, and continued to be so.'

*Dr. Oswald Dykes* traces carefully the circumstances under which this so-called 'community of goods' came to be the temporary fashion. 'This social peculiarity of the Jerusalem Church during the early weeks of its existence is attended with a little difficulty, but that difficulty has been increased by the discussion which has raged over it. When we throw ourselves back into the circumstances of the time,

what really happened becomes more than intelligible—it becomes natural. During the Master's ministry, He and his itinerant assistants, who formed one household for the time being, had naturally one purse, out of which their common expenses were defrayed. This fund, when low, was recruited by the voluntary gifts of well-to-do and generous friends, especially females, who had received spiritual blessing from the Master. The unity of the brotherhood had thus been realized even in its financial arrangements. Now, matters were not felt to have materially changed. There was still a band of Twelve, who could not earn a subsistence because they had spiritual work to do, as well as a number of incapable, aged, and sickly brethren, widows, like the Mother herself, and young children. There was also a larger number than before of somewhat wealthy disciples, such as Nicodemus, Joseph, and Barnabas. All these, as brethren, ate daily at one common table, and counted themselves to be one large family of God, left by their divine Head, indeed, yet not orphans, since the Comforter had come. But how can we speak of brotherhood in the family if the abundance of one brother is not to be a supply for another's want? Inequalities, indeed, are not inconsistent with the family idea; but destitution is. There is, to be sure, no suggestion of what moderns call 'Equality,' as the result of this 'fraternity'; only there is an intolerance of downright want. There must not be among them any that lack. The spirit of fraternity in Christ will at least forbid that; forbid it, not by any statute, but by the instinct of brotherhood working spontaneously yet working irresistibly. The common expenses of the house and table, which belonged to all; the support of the apostles; the relief of destitute and widowed members; all these were from the first a very pressing and patent care. For such purposes a fund was formed under the charge of the apostles. Into that fund all those who had landed property, or real estate of any sort, brought the proceeds of its sale. Besides, I think there is a hint that some capitalists distributed their wealth at their own discretion, as well as through the hands of the church officers. Anyhow, the result was that, under the strong and general feeling of Christian charity which sprang out of Christian unity, men gave as freely as if what they had were not really their own, but only held by them in trust for others.'

*Neander* says: 'When we are told "The whole multitude . . . had all things common," it is not to be understood literally, but as a description of that brotherly love which repressed all selfish feelings, and caused the wealthier believers to regard their property as belonging to their needy brethren, so ready were they to share it with

them. And when it is added, "They sold their possessions," etc., it is to be understood according to what has just been said. A common chest was established, from which the necessities of the poorer members were supplied, and perhaps certain expenses incurred by the whole church, such as the celebration of the agapæ, were defrayed; and in order to increase their contributions, many persons parted with their estates.'

### Tribute-Money.

MATTHEW xvii. 24: 'And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received the tribute-money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?'

**Difficulty.**—*Seeing that our Lord had no property, and was not engaged in any trade, it seems strange that He should be called on to pay taxes.*

**Explanation.**—Taxes have to be distinguished from customs and duties. And taxes may be levied on houses and incomes, or on heads. Our Lord paid no customs as a tradesman or merchant; He was the subject of no tax-claim as a householder or as the recipient of an annual income; but He was a man, a member of the nation, and of full age, and therefore if a tax was laid on 'heads,' He would come under its claim.

The *Revised Version* renders this passage in such a way as to bring out the particular tax which is referred to. 'And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received the half-shekel came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay the half-shekel?'

If we follow this rendering, we understand the tribute or tax referred to to be the gift required by the Mosaic law from all Israelites, towards meeting the expenses of the tabernacle or temple service. *Josephus* is an authority for the statement that, though in earlier times this had been only collected occasionally, as circumstances required, in the time of our Lord it had come to be collected annually, from all Jews above twenty years of age. It was not until the time of Vespasian that this tax was paid into the Roman treasury. As the tax was for religious purposes, in which men shared simply as men, and not on any grounds of their trade, class, or property, the tax was properly paid by our Lord, simply as a worshipping Jew, who desired to 'fulfil all righteousness.'

We learn that this 'half-shekel' was collected even from the Jews in foreign countries. 'The three great Festivals of the Jewish year were recognised as the proper times for payment; and the relations of this narrative to John vii. makes it probable that the collectors were

now calling in, for the Feast of Tabernacles, the payments that had not been made at the Passover or Pentecost previous. Their question implies that they half thought that the Prophet of Nazareth had evaded or would disclaim payment.'

*Geikie* has collected careful details concerning this tax: 'The *Shelihim*, or "messengers," who collected this tax in Judæa, visited each town at fixed times. In foreign countries places were appointed for its collection in every city or district where there were Jews—and where were there not?—the chief men of their community in each acting as treasurer, and conveying the amounts in due course to Jerusalem. Three huge chests, carefully guarded in a particular chamber in the Temple, held the yearly receipts, which served, besides providing the beasts for sacrifice, to pay the Rabbis, inspectors of victims, copyists, bakers, judges, and others connected with the Temple services, and numerous women who wove or washed the Temple linen. It supplied also the costs of the water-supply, and of the repairs of the vast Temple buildings. The collection began in the Holy Land on the first of Adar—part of our February and March—the month of the "returning sun," and the next before that of the Passover. By the middle of it the official exchangers in each town had set up their tables, and opened their two chests for the tax of the current and of the past year, for many paid the tax for two years together. They supplied the old sacred shekel, coined by Simon the Maccabee, for a trifling charge, to all who required it, for only that coin was received by the Temple authorities in homage to Pharisaic and national sentiment. At first everything was left to the goodwill of the people; but after the 25th, prompt payment was required, and securities, such as an under-garment or the like, were taken even from the pilgrims coming up to the feast.' These *Shelihim* made the inquiry of Peter concerning the payment of the half-shekel for Jesus.

### Outside Staircases.

MATTHEW xxiv. 17: 'Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house.'

**Difficulty.**—*This counsel assumes some sort of outside staircase, but if access could be gained to the roof from the public street, how could the house be secure from robbers?*

**Explanation.**—Some travellers have boldly asserted that they never saw, in the East, any such outside stairs as would meet the case of the text; but there appears to be an imperfect understanding

of the arrangements of Eastern houses, and of the possibilities which were before a man who was caught with a sudden alarm when on the house-top.

The rooms were built round an open central court, and there was direct access from this court to the front-door through a smaller court. If the staircase came from the roof into the large court, the man could readily escape at the gate without being hindered by going into or through the rooms. Or the staircase might come into the smaller court, just inside the front-gate.

But our Lord may have contemplated the case of the man not coming down any staircase at all, but fleeing at once over his neighbours' flat roofs, until he found a convenient place for descent. This, of course, was only permissible on sudden emergencies, as very strict laws warned men against even looking over their neighbours' parapets. Over the roofs it was quite possible for a man to reach the city walls and gates. *Dean Plumptre* supports this view: 'The houses in the streets of Jerusalem were built in a continuous line, and with flat roofs, so that a man might pass from house to house without descending into the street until he came to some point near the wall or gate of the city, and so make his escape.'

Assuming that some sort of staircase is tacitly referred to, we may note that *Trench* says there was usually a flight of steps on the outside of the house, as well as, or sometimes instead of, an internal communication of the same kind. But no sufficient authority is given for this explanation.

*Dr. Thomson* is more exactly descriptive of Eastern matters, and he says that the staircase is often outside the house, but *within the exterior court*. It would not be either agreeable or safe to have the stairs land outside the enclosure altogether, and it is rarely done, except in mountain villages, and where roofs are but little used. The stairs not infrequently end in the *lewan*, but more commonly in some lower part of the court.

*Van Lennep*, describing the houses of Western Asia, says: 'The staircase, of stone or wood, which leads to the flat roof, is usually upon the outside of the house, and starts from the central court. But at the great earthquake of Aleppo, in 1822, the few that escaped with their lives happened to be upon the house-tops, and, not going down into the houses or into the narrow streets, fled from roof to roof until they reached the fields outside the city.'

From these accounts we distinctly gather that, whatever was the position of the staircase, it was well within the precincts of the building, and duly protected by the front door or gate.

## Powers of Jewish Tribunals.

JOHN ix. 22 : 'He should be put out of the synagogue.'

**Question.**—*Is there accurate information at command concerning the limits under which the Romans permitted the Jews local government?*

**Answer.**—It was the policy of the Romans not to interfere with the religious systems prevailing in the countries which they conquered and ruled ; and it seems that they even retained the systems of local magistracy, reserving to themselves the power of dealing with serious social crime and offences of a political or semi-political character. But in the case of the Jews the local magistracy was closely connected with the religion, the elder, or elders, of the synogogue having power to deal with common social offences, which were regarded from a religious point of view, and punished mainly by the deprivation of religious privileges. Romans would think little of *such* punishments, but the history of the Jewish race had settled into the minds of all the people an exceeding jealousy of their religious standing and privileges, and the synagogue punishments appealed to this prevailing social sentiment.

The Romans did not interfere with the Jewish excommunications, which seem to have been of three kinds : (1) An injunction that the condemned person was not, for thirty days, to come within four cubits distance of any other person. (2) Absolute banishment from all religious meetings, and exclusion from society, for a time. (3) Perpetual banishment ; entire exclusion from the fellowship of God's people.

The second stage of excommunication needs further explanation. 'If, at the end of thirty days, the offender's repentance was not declared, he was then subject to the *Cherem*, or curse. His offence was proclaimed in the synagogue to which he belonged ; and, at the time of pronouncing the curse, lamps or candles were lighted, which at its conclusion were extinguished, to express that the excommunicated person was then excluded from the light of heaven. The person thus publicly cursed might neither teach others nor they teach him ; but, by study and research, he might teach himself, that, haply, he might be convinced of the guilt or error into which he had fallen. His effects were confiscated ; his male children were not admitted to circumcision ; he might neither hire nor be hired ; no one might trade with him, or employ him in any business, unless it were a very little, to afford him the barest possible means of subsistence ; and if, finally, he died without repentance, stones were cast at

his bier, to denote that he had deserved to be stoned. He was not honoured with a common burial; none followed him to the grave; none lamented for him. It appears, however, that even the persons who laboured under this fearful sentence—which was exceedingly dreaded by the Jews—were not excluded from the services of the temple and synagogues, although they were there dishonourably distinguished from others, and not allowed to mingle with the congregation. They were, in fact, no longer considered members of the Jewish Church, and scarcely deemed members of its common-wealth.

‘We should add that the curse with which this form of excommunication was publicly given was attended with the blowing of trumpets and horns, as if to announce the circumstance to all the world. The number of these instruments appears to have been proportioned to the alleged offence; and among the stories which the Talmudists relate concerning Christ, they tell us that four hundred trumpets were brought out when “Jesus of Nazareth” was excommunicated.’

### Certificates of Cure.

MATTHEW viii. 4: ‘Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.’

**Difficulty.**—*If leprosy was an incurable disease, what necessity could there be for arranging a certificate of cure?*

**Explanation.**—This difficulty rests on the assumption, which is too readily made, that the disease of leprosy was strictly of one kind, always marked by the same characteristic features. What appears to be true is that it was incurable in certain of its forms, and after it had passed certain stages. It is not strictly correct to say of any disease that it is absolutely incurable; all we may say is that it is not curable by any known medical remedies.

The question whether leprosy was an infectious disease is still debated. It is clearly seen that it was hereditary. It was communicated by certain special forms of contact; and we are disposed to think that, in some of its forms, it was strictly infectious. This affords the most simple and natural explanation of the strict removal of lepers from society, and it makes reasonable the extreme care with which the priest used to test an assumed cure, before giving his certificate, and allowing the restored person to return to ordinary life associations.

The process which had to be gone through, on a known leper professing to have been cured, is given in detail in Lev. xiv. It is so

seldom read that good service may be done by repeating it in other terms. 'It was a long process in two stages. First, the priest had to come to the leper outside the camp or town, to kill a sparrow over fresh water, to dip a living sparrow with cedar-wood, scarlet wool, and hyssop, into the blood-stained water, to sprinkle the leper seven times with this strange aspergillum, and then let the living bird loose, and pronounce the man clean. The man was then to shave off his hair, bathe, remain seven days out of his house; again shave and bathe, and return to the priest, bringing one lamb for a trespass-offering, and a second with a ewe-lamb for a burnt and sin offering (or, if too poor to do this, two young pigeons), and flour and oil for a meat-offering. Some of the blood of the trespass-offering and some of the oil was then put, with certain ceremonies, on the tip of his right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the great toe of his right foot, the rest of the oil being poured upon his head. He was then pronounced clean. There could not well be any dispute about the reality of the cleansing, after ceremonials so elaborate as this.'

The importance of the priestly certificate lay in this, that without it the man could not be restored to the Temple, or even to synagogue, worship. We are not told whether these strict ceremonies were maintained down to the time of our Lord; possibly the presentation of an offering was treated as sufficient.

It is certain that Moses could not regard any disease as absolutely incurable, for that would be to put limitations on the Divine power. Since God could cure even leprosy, proper ceremonials had to be established for recognising what was at least a possibility, and more than once in the history of the race proved to be a fact.

## Breaking up Roofs.

**MARK ii. 4:** 'They uncovered the roof where He was, and when they had broken it up.'

**Difficulty.**—*One cannot understand whence they obtained permission to break up a man's roof; nor how they managed to do it without covering the company below with choking dust.*

**Explanation.**—St. Matthew narrates this incident, but gives no description of the mode in which the men succeeded in overcoming their hindrances, and getting the sick man into the presence of Jesus (Matt. ix. 1-8). St. Luke is as careful in details as St. Mark, but somewhat differs from him. He says: 'They went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus' (Luke v. 19). From St. Mark we learn pre-

cisely that the incident occurred at Capernaum ; and there is good reason for assuming that, in this town, our Lord lodged in the house of Simon and Andrew, which, suitably to their station, would be one of the better-class houses of a country town.

An inquiry into this incident should start with the assumption that the damage done to the building was the least possible that would meet the necessity of the case, and was such as the men who did it could themselves readily repair. So many and such various explanations are at our command that the inquiry resolves itself into a criticism of them, and an effort to discover the most reasonable.

Some idea may be first given of the opinions entertained by commentators. *Alford* thinks that Jesus was 'speaking to the crowd from the upper story of the house, they being assembled in the court, or perhaps (but less probably) in the street. Those who bore the paralytic ascended the stairs, which led direct from the street to the flat roof of the house, and let him down through the tiles.' He assumes that the house was of two stories ; imagines a staircase from the street ; and avoids the attempt to explain what 'letting down through the tiles' can mean.

*Olshausen* says : 'The whole description can be understood only from the Oriental construction of houses, in consequence of which the flat roof might be reached either by a ladder from the outside, or from a neighbouring house. Still, the breaking up of the top-floor, which was generally laid with tiles, appears rather strange ; but perhaps the description is to be understood of their somewhat enlarging the entrance into the house from above.' *Olshausen* does not seem to have decided whether Jesus was teaching in a room or in the quadrangle ; but on this depends our explanation of the incident. The idea of 'letting the couch down' does not suggest 'carrying it down an inside stair.'

*Webster* and *Wilkinson* give what we think to be the most simple and most satisfactory explanation we have met with ; its simplicity and naturalness being its chief recommendation. 'Many Oriental houses have a court or quadrangle *in front* ; the buildings which form the house occupy one or more of its sides. The internal part of such a house is often screened by a corridor below, having the various household offices behind it, and a gallery above, from which is the entrance to the family apartments. The gallery is roofed over, and its roof is about the same height as the roof of the house. Bearing this in mind we may account for the following description in this way. The quadrangle is full of people ; our Lord instructs them *from the gallery* ; the Pharisees are in the family apartments

adjoining the gallery; the friends of the sick man cannot enter the quadrangle from the street; or, if this could be done, they cannot reach the corridor, from which there were steps leading to the gallery; they ascend, therefore, the stairs from the back or side of the house leading to the roof, and break open the roof or veranda which covered the gallery. The house-roof was used for a terrace, and was built of strong materials; the gallery-roof was of very slight construction, of the same character as the covered balcony.' This explanation wholly removes the two difficulties of creating dust and injuring the building.

*Trench* tells us that 'in St. Mark, at least, the words are so plain and clear, that we can suppose nothing else than that a part of the actual covering of the roof was removed, that so the bed on which the palsied man lay might be let down before the Lord. The whole circumstance will be much more easily conceived, and present fewer difficulties, when we keep in mind that it was probably the upper chamber where were assembled those that were drawn together to hear the Lord.' This explanation brings us in full front of the two difficulties which we have suggested, but give no help toward the skilful treatment of them.

*Dean Plumpton* notes that the expression used by St. Mark is a very strong one, and means literally 'and having dug it up.' He thinks actual injury was done to the ordinary roof; and that the light structure of Eastern houses made the work comparatively easy.

*Bishop Wordsworth* says that the roof might be the covering of an interior colonnade surrounding the atrium, or court. But to this, and to another suggestion, that our Lord was speaking in a large upper room, the objection may fairly be urged, that such colonnades and such upper rooms, were only found in superior houses, to which class Peter's did not belong.

We may now give some of the explanations offered by travellers or residents in Palestine, whose actual knowledge and observation should give material help.

*Dr. Thomson* is the authority for the view that there was an actual breaking up of the substance of the roof. He says: 'I have often seen this ("breaking up the roof") done, and have done it myself to houses in Lebanon; but there is always more dust made than is agreeable. The materials now employed (for roofs) are beams, about three feet apart, across which short sticks are arranged close together, and covered with the thickly-matted thorn-bush called *bellan*. Over this is spread a coat of thick mortar, and then comes

the marl or earth which makes the roof. Now, it is easy to remove any part of this without injuring the rest. No objection, therefore, would be made on this score by the owners of the house. They had merely to scrape back a portion of the roof over the *lewan*, take up the thorns and short sticks, and let down the couch between the beams at the very feet of Jesus.' But how could they know exactly the part of the room in which Jesus was? How could the people outside hear Jesus if He spoke in a room? And how could these men break up the roof, in this sense, without making such a noise as would disturb both speaker and hearers? It is hardly possible to accept this very ingenious explanation, which creates more difficulties than it removes.

*Van Lennep* and *Kitto* are the authorities for the idea of a gallery or veranda roof, which has been given from *Webster and Wilkinson*. *Van Lennep* says: 'The roofs are not covered with tiles; but there is often a veranda running round the court, and this is shaded by boards, which would, according to the Greek and Roman fashion then prevailing, be covered with tiles. The court was evidently full of people, and Jesus spoke seated on the veranda, which was higher. The men quietly took off the tiles overhead, as is frequently done in order to rearrange them, and let down the man along the edge of the veranda, without even removing a board.' And *Kitto* says: 'There are usually but two floors—the ground-floor and an upper floor. The ground-floor comprises the kitchen, store-rooms, and various offices; and the family lives in the upper floor, the chambers of which look into, and open into, a gallery, to which there is access by one or two staircases, usually of stone. The gallery is generally broad, and is covered with a boarded roof, supported by wooden pillars. As Jesus was in this gallery, the course the men had to take was plain and simple. They had only to take up two or three of the loosely-attached boards, forming the covering of the gallery, and there was a clear and sufficient opening through which to let their friend down to the feet of our Saviour.'

## Right of Plucking Ears of Corn.

MATTHEW xii. 1: 'At that season Jesus went on the sabbath day through the cornfields; and His disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck ears of corn, and to eat' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*What limitations were put on this liberty to pluck the corn, so that serious loss and damage might not fall on the farmer?*

**Answer.**—The limitations needed were sufficiently found in the circumstances and sentiments of the country, and in the rule that the

barley or wheat might be taken for immediate use, but none might be carried away.

Reading this incident with the associations of Western life, we think the permission was very unjust to the farmers, who, in our country, do suffer serious loss from the wanton damaging of the crops by the people who walk through the fields. We have not the Jewish sentiment, that the land is the Lord's, and the produce of the land is His, and therefore the fruitage ought to be at the command of any of the Lord's people who might be in sudden distress. The disciples took, not the farmer's corn, but Jehovah's corn.

Then it should be noted that Eastern people do not freely walk about, for the pleasure of walking, as do Westerns. They prefer sitting; they avoid exertion; so that at any time there would be very few people in the fields, and these only going through on their business.

And travellers would only take a few ears to stay the gnawings of hunger; they would do no injury to the growing corn, and the little they would take would hardly amount to a gleaning. Limit our European customs to a permission, granted to *bona-fide* travellers, that they might take sufficient to satisfy passing hunger, and no farmer would be found to complain.

The Eastern custom was so well established, that the opponents of Jesus do not complain of the disciples for taking the ears, but for taking them on the Sabbath, contrary to the Rabbinical rules. With characteristic exaggeration, this rubbing of the ears on the Sabbath was treated by the Legalists as a capital offence. It seems that to reap or thresh on the Sabbath was forbidden by one of the *abhôth*, or primary rules, but 'the Rabbis had decided that to pluck corn was to be construed as reaping, and to rub it as thrashing; even to walk on the grass was forbidden, because that, too, was a species of threshing; and not so much as a fruit must be plucked from a tree. All these latter acts were violations of the *toldôth*, or derivative rules.'

The law as laid down by Moses has its own sufficient limitations. 'When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn' (Lev. xxiii. 25).

The custom is maintained to the present day. *Dr. Thomson* says: 'I have often seen my muleteers, as we passed along the wheat-fields, pluck the ears, rub them in their hands, and eat the grains unroasted, just as the Apostles are said to have done.'

## The Needle's Eye.

MATTHEW xix. 24 : ' And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'

**Difficulty.**—*This appears to be quite an extravagant figure of speech, unless there is some unusual Eastern association with the term 'needle's eye.'*

**Explanation.**—In this instance there is a striking illustration of the needless confusion created by the attempt to explain Scripture allusions without due consideration of Eastern customs and associations. Very laboured have been the efforts to make a 'camel' mean a kind of rope, whereas it means nothing but a camel. And most commentators have to rest satisfied with the conclusion, that the sentence must have been a popular proverb to express the doing of what is nearly impossible; in such a conclusion shirking, rather than explaining, the difficulty.

It seems that our Lord meant exactly what He said. The 'needle's eye' was the common name given to the small gate beside the larger one at the entrance of a city, through which a camel had to be hardly squeezed and pulled if his master arrived after the large gates were shut. Eastern travellers describe as almost ludicrous the desperate efforts which are necessary in getting the big, unwieldy creature through the little gate.

*Lord Nugent* was the first to call attention to the possible reference of the term to the narrow gate, which is often formed for foot-passengers beside the larger gate of Eastern cities; and *Miss Von Finkelstein*, who has resided for many years in Palestine, gives a very graphic description of the scene suggested by our Lord's reference, in one of her popular lectures. City gates are shut at sunset, or soon after. Some of them contain, in one of their folds, a small door, which is left open for an hour or more after sunset to accommodate foot-passengers accidentally delayed outside the walls or in the town; and it can be opened even later with a backshish. This little door is said to be called by the Arabs of the present day 'the eye of a needle.'

*Van Lennep* is incredulous as to the sufficiency of this explanation. He says: 'We have not met with the expression, but it seems not improbable that it has sometimes been used to denote the smallness of the opening. Nor have we ever heard, as some have asserted, that camels are sometimes made to pass through this little door upon their knees after their load and pack-saddle have been taken off.

The fact is, a camel could never pass through such a door, for, besides being small and low, its threshold, which consists of the lower part of the great gate, is a foot and a half or two feet in height.' It is evident, however, that Van Lennep is only taking into account one particular kind of small gate. There were small gates sometimes at the sides of the larger gates, which had no such thresholds, and were only very narrow for big animals.

As illustrations of the proverbial use of this and similar figures, we may quote from *Lightfoot* the following specimens: 'In a discourse about dreams, to intimate that they do not exhibit things of which the mind had no previous conception, it is said, "They do not show a golden palm-tree or an elephant passing through the eye of a needle." To one who had related something very absurd and incredible, it was said, "Perhaps thou art one of the Pumbeditha (a Jewish school at Babylon), who can make an elephant go through the eye of a needle." So, too, in the *Koran*, "until the camel shall enter the needle's eye," or ear in Arabic.'

*Roberts* gives the Indian form of the proverb: 'Just as soon will an elephant pass through the spout of a kettle.' 'Ah! the old sinner, he finds it no easy thing to die; his life is lingering; it cannot escape; it is like the elephant trying to get through the spout of a kettle.'

## Malicious Sowing of Tares.

MATTHEW xiii. 25: 'But while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.'

**Question.**—*Can we think that our Lord's illustration is based on any common custom of those times?*

**Answer.**—It satisfies the case of a parable if we admit that the thing described in it *might be done*: it is not necessary to affirm that the thing *had been done*. It is quite a natural and reasonable supposition that an enemy *might*, maliciously, scatter the seeds of noxious weeds in a newly-sown field, and actual instances of such wickedness have been met with, and reported.

*Dr. Thomson* makes it extremely doubtful whether anything approaching a custom of such a kind was established in the country and age of our Lord. His treatment of this subject we have not seen noticed, and the explanations of the commentaries have been allowed to pass without their necessary qualifications. After identifying the 'tare' with the Arabic *Zowan*, a strong soporific poison, *Dr. Thomson* says: 'How are you to answer a farmer who takes you to a field

nearly all tares, and declares that he there sowed clean seed, and that in previous years he always reaped good harvests of pure grain? Whence the present crop of tares? he asks, and so do you. I have repeatedly examined such fields with all the care in my power, and without finding an answer. It would be easy to say, as in the parable, "An enemy hath done this;" but, though I have read in authors who never *resided in Palestine* that bad men do thus injure their enemies, I have never found a person in the country itself who had either known or heard of such an act. It is certainly remarkable that Arab malice has never adopted this mode of injuring its victims; but the fact must be told,—it is altogether unknown at the present day. It must have been done, however, in the time of our Saviour, or He would not have mentioned it in His parable. At all events the farmers of this day will not admit that their fields have thus been filled with tares, and I believe them. We must, therefore, find some other solution of a phenomenon which occurs so often that I have myself had frequent opportunities to verify it.'

*Roberts* gives illustrations of this malicious practice in India; and we have met with the following fresh proof that so shamefully wicked a method of taking revenge has entered into the minds of bad men: 'The country of Ill-Will is the byname of a district hard by St. Arnaud, in the north of France. There, tenants, when ejected by a landlord, or when they have ended their tenancy on uncomfortable terms, have been in the habit of spoiling the crop to come by vindictively sowing tares and other coarse strangling weeds among the wheat, whence has been derived the sinister name in question. The practice has been made penal; and any man proved to have tampered with any other man's harvest will be dealt with as a criminal.'

*Trench* says that in the Roman law the possibility of this form of injury was contemplated; and adds that he actually knew of an outgoing Irish tenant who, with such a malicious intent, sowed wild oats in the fields he was leaving.

## One Bed for a Family.

LUKE xi. 7: 'Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed: I cannot rise and give thee.'

**Question.**—*Is this allusion to one family bed to be taken literally?*

**Answer.**—The simple question that must be decided is this: What were the customs of the country and the time? Such a family arrangement is so repugnant to our notions of what is seemly, that we are set upon persuading ourselves that our Lord did not really

mean what He said ; and we search for some possible meaning which may bring the expression into harmony with Western notions. We think He may have meant, 'We are all of us in our beds.'

Eastern people have no proper bed-chambers or beds. They sleep at night in the rooms they occupy by day. They lie down without removing any clothes except the outer robe, which is often laid over them as a quilt. They rest on mats or mattresses, which, along with the coverlids, are kept by day in a cupboard, out of one corner of the room. This is called the bed, or, more properly, bedding chamber.

Still, under such arrangements, we may assume that it was the usual thing for individuals to lie separately, and this would certainly be the case in better-class families ; but there is good evidence that, among the poorer people, it was not infrequent for a whole family to lie together under one large quilt ; of course it was strictly a family arrangement.

We are told, by those who are very familiar with Eastern life, that parents sleep in the same chamber with their children, unless they can afford to keep servants, to whose charge they may be entrusted. A mother has been known to sleep in the same bed with her five children ; this bed being spread upon a permanent platform, built of wood, at one corner of the room, with a low railing round it.

*G. O. Wray*, in his journal in Palestine (1863), relates the following : 'Our quarters for the night are a family dwelling-house, consisting of one chamber thirty feet square, with dome roof of solid masonry ; on one side of the room is a raised floor of ten feet in breadth. On the floor of this *daïs* sleep the grandfather or patriarch, and his family of children and grand-children, male and female, some eight of them, under a vast blanket.'

The word in the above passage which is translated 'bed,' is an unusual one, and properly means the *divan*, or raised platform, which often filled nearly half a room in a Jewish or Eastern house.

## Money-Changers in the Temple Courts.

MATTHEW xxi. 12 : 'And Jesus went into the Temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves.'

**Questions.**—*Was this a recent or a long-established custom ? And wherein lay the sin of it which aroused our Lord's indignation ?*

**Answer.**—The first person to introduce this sacrilegious custom was, according to the Talmud, one *Babha Ben Buta*, who brought

three thousand sheep of the flocks of Kedar into the Mountain of the House, that is, into the Court of the Gentiles, and so within the consecrated precincts. The practice grew out of the desire to meet the convenience of the foreign Jews, who visited the Holy City at the Feasts, and were glad to purchase close at hand the beasts they desired to offer in sacrifice, and to exchange their foreign money for the orthodox Jewish shekel.

From early times there had been shops of merchants, and the banks of money-changers, ranged on both sides of the Eastern Gate—the gate Shusan—as far as Solomon's Porch. This was not altogether seemly, but no serious mischief would have been done if the evil had stopped there. But 'the vicinity of the Court of the Gentiles, with its broad spaces and long arcades, had been too tempting to Jewish greed.' The profane example of Ben Buta was soon followed. 'The *chanujôth* of the shopkeepers, the exchange booths of the usurers, gradually crept within the sacred enclosure.' The priestly party, which was in active enmity against Christ, very probably enriched themselves by letting off the spaces of the court to these traffickers, and they were especially incensed against Him for at once stopping their gains, and holding them up to reproach for practices at which they connived.

In the sight of our Lord the sin lay in thus seeking merely selfish ends where God alone ought to have been sought. It seemed to Him the highest and worst expression of the rampant formalism which had displaced spiritual Judaism. Even the place of worship was defiled to the use of man's covetousness. It was hypocrisy to pretend provision for the Temple-service, when they meant only to secure personal gain; and our Lord's severest things were said and done concerning the hypocrite and the covetous. He was 'filled with righteous scorn at such mean irreverence.'

*Kitto* explains that, 'though the custom had in its origin the excuse of public convenience, and the traffic had at first been conducted with that subdued decorum which the sacred place exacted, yet, from the progressing corruptions of the people, many foul indecorums had crept in; and the merchants and brokers, with the eager cupidity which had already become their characteristic, soon made everything subservient to their avarice; and their noisy toutings and keen hucksterings not only defiled the sacred courts, but greatly disturbed those who came to worship at the Temple.'

It has been seriously questioned whether our Lord did, in fact, cleanse the Temple courts, in a similar way, on two distinct occasions, and with an interval of some two years. It is certainly remark-

able that the earlier cleansing is omitted by the Synoptists, and that there is no reference to the later cleansing by the fourth Evangelist. Had we to decide upon mere probabilities, we should certainly say that two cleansings so near together were unlikely, and that the incident more naturally connects itself with our Lord's last visit to Jerusalem, and the remarkable public assertion of His royal claims.

### Gnashing of Teeth.

MATTHEW viii. 12: 'But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**Question.**—*On what conditions of human feeling is this strong figure based?*

**Answer.**—'Gnashing' of teeth is the natural bodily expression of extreme cold. It is the condition of one who is turned out of a heated banqueting-hall into the chill, dark, winter's night, clad only in his light, festal robes. We are more familiar with the very similar expression 'chattering of teeth.' The 'outer darkness' is the gloom of the narrow street, which was not provided with any public lights, and was even a place of danger in the night-time.

In this passage our Lord is not dealing with the final conditions of men in the future life, but with the relations in which men stood, or would stand, to the new dispensation, the new kingdom, which He came to establish. Unexpected ones would be found *within* the light and warmth of that kingdom. Expectant ones, who pride themselves on their mere race-rights, would be found outside, in the cold and the dark. There is no need that we should find more than this reproof and warning of the self-confident ones in the passage. That is a reproof and warning which ought to come searchingly to us all.

*Geikie* paraphrases the passage thus: 'I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west and lie down at the table of God in the kingdom of the Messiah, as honoured guests, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the Jew, who prided himself on being, by birth, the child of the heavenly kingdom, and despised all others, as doomed to sit in the darkness outside the banquet-hall of the Messiah, will have to change places with them.'

Some curious instances have been collected of the association of the wretchedness of extreme cold with the idea of hell. The Scandinavian demon *Hel*, phonetically corresponding with Kali, the Black One (Gothic, *Halja*), whose abode is an icy hole, has her name preserved as a place of fiery torment. The realm called Hades suggests cold. *Tertullian* and *Jerome* say that Christ's own phrases,

'outer darkness' and the 'gnashing (chattering) of teeth,' suggest a place of extreme cold alternating with excessive heat. Traces of similar speculations are found with the Rabbins. Thus Rabbi Joseph says, Gehenna had both water and fire. Noah saw the angel of Death approaching, and hid from him twelve months. Why twelve? Because, explains Rabbi Jehuda, such is the trial of sinners, six in water, six in fire. Dante, following Virgil, has frigid as well as burning hills; and the idea was refined by some scholiasts to a statement which would seem to make the alternations of future punishment amount to a severe ague and fever. In Thibet hell is believed to have sixteen circles, eight burning, eight frozen. Plutarch, relating the vision of Thespesius in Hades, speaks of the frozen regions there. Shakespeare has the following lines in 'Measure for Measure':

'The delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice.'

### In Paradise.

LUKE xxiii. 43: 'And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.'

**Question.**—*As used by our Lord, was this merely an assurance of coming death, or was it an explanation of what the condition of the thief would be in the next life?*

**Answer.**—A careful and unprejudiced examination of the incident with which this passage is associated is extremely difficult to secure, because of the associations with it which have been fixed for ages, and which we think must be true because they are so old. And yet the fact is that we have connected *our* thoughts and sentiments about being 'in Paradise' with it, and have not duly endeavoured to understand the sentiments of the Jews, the sentiments which both our Lord and the thief must have shared, and which our Lord expresses in His assurance.

Making a resolute effort to divest ourselves of long-established notions, we attempt a reverent and sympathetic study of the entire narrative.

There is no need for making more than one slight alteration of the passage as we have it in the Authorized Version. In verse 42, the expression '*into* Thy kingdom' should be rendered, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest *in* Thy kingdom.'

'Paradise,' as a figure of speech, can only be rightly understood

in the light of the thoughts that were familiar to the Jews of our Lord's time. They do not appear to have conceived what the condition of the soul would be after the resurrection and the judgment. They strictly limited the reach of their imaginations to what we now call the 'the intermediate state.' Their general name for the place of disembodied spirits was Hades (Greek), or Sheol (Hebrew); but in a very natural way, this one place, Hades, was thought of as divided into two sections. The dual division of men, into 'good' and 'bad,' must have its counterpart in this 'intermediate state.' And so the gathering place of the good came to be known as 'Paradise'; and the gathering place of the bad was called 'Gehenna.' Both together made up the *abode of the dead*. Now, it was quite appropriate for Christ, as a good man, to say that on His death, He would go to the part of Hades known as Paradise; and it was most comforting that He could assure the poor thief, who would expect to go to Gehenna, that he should be with Him 'in Paradise.'

The story of the two thieves has been injured by being taken from its natural connections, and regarded as an unrelated incident; whereas the truth is, that these crucified malefactors were very fully influenced by what was going on around them. Just at this time the Jews were again and again agitated by the uprising of persons claiming to be Messiahs. We know the names of some: Theudas, and Judas of Galilee. Now, Jesus of Nazareth had been regarded by many as only another of these impostors. He was distinctly condemned for claiming to be Messiah; and though He had certainly done many mighty works, yet His yielding to arrest, His meek attitude at His trial, and His failure to deliver Himself by miracle—things which it seemed quite impossible to associate with the true Messiah—deceived His enemies into the conclusion that He was now a proved impostor.

It is necessary also to observe that these incidents of our passage occurred during the *earlier* part of the crucifixion time, before the darkness had fallen about the cross, and amid the shoutings and the raillery which accompanied the lifting up of the crosses and fixing them firmly in the ground. Then the people were crowding round, the Jewish rulers stood by, and all joined in that terrible jeering which, a thousand times since then, has greeted the appearance of the prisoner on the scaffold. What a pitiful sight it was! As if utterly to scorn those Jews who had compelled him to do a judicial murder, Pilate had put over this helpless crucified claimant to Messiahship these words: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' What an outburst followed the sight of those words as the cross

was raised ! 'He's no King of the Jews !' 'If He be Christ, let Him come down from the cross !' Satire blends with scorn : 'He saved others indeed, or professed to do so : let us see if He can save Himself, now, with the strong nails through His hands and feet. Here is a grand chance for Him, if He be Messiah indeed. Our Messiah will never die a malefactor's death. He will save Himself, *if He can* ; but, see, He can't. Behold, there He is, the proved impostor of Nazareth, dying in His helplessness and shame !'

It is impossible for us to understand this story unless we can enter into the spirit of this scene. We must hear that one cry, 'Save thyself.' 'Save Thyself and us.' 'If Thou be the Christ, come down from the cross ; deliver your companions ; begin, in your own rescue from death, the kingdom of which you spoke so much !' One question stirred all hearts about His cross until they heard His dying cry : 'Will He save Himself and begin His kingdom ?'

Now, we may venture to look at this scene from the point of view of the praying thief, and try to enter into his thoughts. He was affected by the near approach of death. Nearing death has two effects on men. Some it makes scornfully daring. Some it solemnizes and humbles. This man felt hurt by his companion's scorn. All were going into the presence of their Maker and Judge, and at least he might feel some shame when he remembered that that they were carrying a burden of crime, while their companion was dying in innocence, 'He had done nothing amiss.' And as he spoke to his fellow-thief, the thought came, 'Perhaps, after all, this is the Messiah. If He is, then that is not the way in which to speak to Him ; better pray ; perhaps, even now, He will put forth His power, and save Himself and us from death.' So this man's prayer to Christ really means this : 'Lord, I know Thou art not about really to die on that cross. When Thou putttest forth Thy power, and savest Thyself, and comest in Thy kingdom, Lord, remember me, deliver me !' The man pleads for rescue from approaching death. And our Lord's answer to him then means : 'I am not going to save Myself, and I shall not save you. Do not rest in any such notion. This very day we shall both die, and go to Paradise.'

The expression, then, 'in Paradise' may be accepted as a simple poetic setting of the fact that on that very day they both should die ; they both should be in the realm of the dead ; and there is no need for us to force aside the veil that so wisely hides from human view the mysteries of the future state, which human intelligence is as yet unfitted to apprehend.

### SECTION III.

## DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO THE MIRACULOUS.

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### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

'WITH God all things are possible.' In dealing with this class of difficulties, we cherish the reverent sentiment which is so effectively expressed by Job (ch. xlii. 2), 'I know that Thou canst do everything.' Doubt of the Divine power to do more marvellous things than any which are recorded, we will give no place to. '*Allah Akbar*,' 'God is great.' We will not even think of limitations of His illimitable power. Anything and everything which is not ridiculous in the statement God can do. It is sometimes said that God cannot make two and two count five, or set two things in the same place at the same time. But these are not 'impossibilities'; they are foolish statements; the impossibilities in them only belong to the conditions under which human thinking is placed.

But what we have reverently to ask is this—not what God *can* do, but what He has *been pleased* to do. We are to accept the revelation which He has given us, and try to understand it, fully assured that revelation means 'light.' If He is pleased to show us the methods of His working, or permits us to recognise the agencies He uses, then it is becoming, it is right, that we should learn all we possibly can concerning His ways and His means, assured that *they* will prove to us valuable helps towards the better knowing of Him.

In this spirit we propose to deal with the miracles recorded in Scripture; not desiring to be wise above what is written, but regarding the revealed Word as given us to be studied and understood—all the better understood as man's general and scientific knowledge advances, and throws sidelights upon the Book. Nothing approaching to an exhaustive discussion is in any case attempted; there

could only be such views of miraculous incidents presented as may reasonably be taken in these days of keen Biblical criticism and enlarged scientific knowledge.

The point which it is proposed variously to illustrate, in dealing with Bible miracles, is that man's knowledge is strictly *limited to that which has been revealed to him*—either directly through his senses, in relation to the world of things in the midst of which he is set ; or, mediately, through the operations of his mind on the material thus offered to his senses ; or, further, by the special communications which God may be pleased to make in His written Word, or by the lips of His servants.

All man's knowledge is *revelational*. But this is to affirm that it is a *part* only of the great whole of truth and life—just the part that suffices for the particular life on this earth which man is required to live. Out of the infinite treasury he is furnished with just so much as he needs for the present. Whatsoever comes to any man, at any time, as a glimpse of the infinite truth and life, he calls miraculous ; he may even, with some propriety, call it 'supernatural,' because it transcends that sphere of 'Nature' with which he alone is familiar. It is strictly the higher natural, the higher order, and is simply another order than that with which our senses and our faculties are set in relation.

It is, no doubt, very difficult for us to conceive of any other than this 'natural order' with which we are now associated. A certain piece or part of the 'universal order' has been revealed to us ; but we have no right to argue that *all* the forces working in the universe are working in this our world, or even that they are all *illustrated* by forces that are working here. Perhaps the simplest aid we can secure towards a clear apprehension of this distinction may be gained by conceiving of beings among us who have *seven* senses or *ten* senses. Such persons would have apprehensions of existing things which are absolutely closed to us ; and yet everything that they know would be strictly in the sphere of the 'natural.' If any one of us has that gift known as 'second sight,' or the 'mesmeric' power, we do not think of them as accomplishing anything miraculous ; they only have apprehension of a natural order which is at present beyond the vision and ability of ordinary men. *Dr. Horace Bushnell* puts the distinction in very felicitous terms : 'Nature is not in any proper and complete sense the system of God, but is in fact a subordinate member only of a higher and virtually supernatural system, to whose uses it is subject. It is in fact a Thing ; while the real Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Powers, Himself the Regal Power. . . . Not

even miracles, wrought by a supernatural Divine agency, necessarily imply any removal or suspension of its laws (laws of Nature); for Nature is subjected by her laws, both to God's activity and to ours, to be thus acted on and varied in her operation by the new combinations or conjunctions of causes they are able to produce.'

The same view is reached along another line of thought. All the processes of thinking, under our present human conditions, are dependent on two primary conceptions, those of 'Time' and of 'Space.' We can only think things in sequence; one must be before or behind the other. And everything must take room; it must lie *beside* something else. But 'time' and 'space' are purely earthly conditions. They determine *man's* thinking; but they need not determine the thinking of every creature God has made, as they certainly do not determine the thinking of God, to whom 'time' is an eternal 'now,' and 'space' is infinite. Some of the so-called 'miracles' are really no more than time-puzzles; things done at once which men say cannot be done except in time. If corn-plants usually took twelve months for their ripening, we should call it a miracle that, in a given case, they ripened in six months. And now that they ripen in six, we think it a miracle that they should, in a given case, ripen in an hour.

In treating of miracles a clear distinction should be made between an Atheistic and a Theistic standpoint. We make no attempt to discuss the abstract question of the miraculous from the Atheistic position. We believe in God—a personal, living Being, Creator of all things, Controller of all forces, for whose supreme pleasure everything is, acts, and maintains relations.

Many definitions of 'miracle' have been attempted. None have yet been generally accepted, and recognised as undoubtedly satisfactory. If we deal with miracle apart from its special Scriptural features, it should seem sufficient to say that by a miracle we mean 'any event for which we are unable to assign an antecedent or a cause.' If we can explain a thing—or, if we have experience or knowledge that enables us to trace how a thing has come about—then we do not call it a miracle.

But this at once brings up to view the fact, that different things will be called miracles at different times. Given an age in which man's knowledge is limited and his observation superficial, and in such an age miracles will abound. One half the things man has to do with will seem to be supernatural; unusual operations of nature, storms, ice, eclipses, earthquakes, etc., will be treated as miraculous. But such things are only 'miracle' in the sense of being beyond the know-

ledge and experience of the age. 'In the remoter and more primitive ages of the world, it will be observed that mankind, whether by reason of some native instinct as yet uncorrupted, or some native weakness yet uneradicated, were abundantly disposed to believe in things supernatural. They had little thought of nature as an existing scheme of order and law. Everything was supernatural. The universe itself, in all its parts, was only a vast theatre in which the gods and demi-gods were acting their parts.'

Given an age in which knowledge abounds and observation is keen and precise, and then the miraculous will be set under the narrowest possible limitations. Let a miracle be asserted, and men will at once submit its evidence to the most searching tests, and disprove the miraculous in it if they possibly can. They will trace its causes, connections, and processes, and identify its laws with such as are already recognised as 'natural laws.'

Then the evidential value of a so-called 'miracle' depends upon the impression which it makes on those for whom the miracle *was first wrought*. No miracle or unusual event can be an evidence of equal value to all persons, or in all ages. Its power is relative. And we have to ask : What was the value of the miracle as evidence, or, better, as revelation, *when it occurred*, and to those for whose sake it was wrought? Because its miraculous character has been removed for us by advancing knowledge, we have no right to declare it false in itself, or to say that it deceived those to whom it first came.

Revelation must always be *relational*. A perfect revelation could only come to perfect and perfectly furnished beings. Qualified and limited revelations alone are adapted to a race which is advancing in knowledge by stages. It may very well be that at some stages, the best possible revelation is that which convinces of the direct intervention of God.

In considering the miraculous, as presented in the Scriptures, this point should be kept well in mind : *Every Bible miracle must be studied in its setting*. If we can explain its processes, those for whom it was wrought could not. And both of us get the true lesson and influence of the miracle, when the one says : 'God wrought it in ways that I *cannot* explain ;' and the other says : 'God wrought it in ways that I *can* explain.' The essential thing for both of us is that *God wrought it*.

In precisely this lies the value, for all the ages, of the records of Bible miracles. They are impressions of the Divine working, and revelations of the Divine character. The more fully we, in these days, can see that the Divine Being, always and everywhere, works along

the lines of His own orderly laws, the more perfect should be our reverence for Him and trust in Him. It is not in the least degree necessary to a true and reverent view of God, that we should conceive of Him as the embodiment of a power that works oddly, impulsively, or spasmodically.

We must, however, give careful attention to the very important relations which a personal *will* may bear in the orderly outworking and application of any system of laws, for in this direction will be found the true explanation of the miraculous. There is a system of fixed laws which regulates the wise ordering of a man's private life and conduct; but the man's personal will modifies, controls, and arranges the working together of those laws. There is a system of laws for the government of families; but, for high moral ends, those laws are set in fresh measures and relations by the parental will. So we are to understand there is a higher spiritual order—the superior law of the Divine Will, which may overrule and readjust the relations of the ordinary laws.

This point is of so great importance, that we may restate it under the authority of some honoured names.

It is not more clearly presented than by *F. W. Robertson* ('Sermons,' ii. 40): 'What we call laws are simply the subordinate expressions of a will. There must be a will before there can be a law. Certain antecedents are followed by certain consequents. When we see this succession, we are satisfied, and call it natural. But there are emergencies in which it may be necessary for the will to assert itself, and become not the mediate, but the immediate antecedent to the consequent. No subordinate agent interposes; simply the first cause comes in contact with a result. The audible expression of will is followed immediately by something which is generally preceded by some lower antecedent, which we call a cause. A miracle is the manifestation to man of the voluntariness of power.'

Taking illustration from the controlling power given to the human will, *Dr. Horace Bushnell* argues thus: 'What an immense action upon nature are we ourselves seen to have, as a race, when we consider the multifarious wheels and engines we have put to work, the heavy burdens we carry round the globe in our ships, the structures we raise, the cultivation we practise! We make the world in fact another world. All of which is referable to a force supernatural in the last degree. Nature, unapplied or uncombined by our wills, could do no such thing. Wills only have this power, and wills are supernatural. If now *we* have a power so immense over the world

as we see in all our works and wonders of contrivance, is it credible that God can have no way of access to nature, no power at all over nature? Is He the only Will excluded from a sovereignty over it?

There are two tendencies in relation to the miraculous, as recorded in Scripture, both of which the careful and reverent student anxiously resists. One is the tendency to exaggerate the miraculous element, and find the supernatural everywhere. This is a weak and a weakening tendency, and does not honour the great Wonder-worker; while its results excite the scoffings of the ungodly. If we firmly hold that God is in *all* the orders and systems of laws, as the supreme user and controller, in those at any time known to men, and in those unknown, we can at once accept any adequate explanation that may be given of a so-called miracle, and say concerning it, that we will no longer call it a miracle, for in that case God evidently wrought through the ordinary and known processes of nature.

One of our purposes in dealing with the difficulties connected with the miraculous which are found in our Scriptures, is to relieve the Sacred Book of some of the needless burdens which it has been compelled to bear. We hope to find God *in nature*, where our fathers thought they found God working *beyond nature*; and we would learn to adore the Wisdom that devised a system of laws that proves adequate to explain so many more cases than we had supposed—a system so perfect that it is seen to need fewer exceptions than we had imagined.

The other tendency is to eliminate the miraculous. With the rationalistic spirit we have no sympathy, because, in seeking to explain the genesis of all so-called miracles, it seeks to remove all sense of God, all need for God. And miserable, indeed, are the shifts to which the rationalistic genius is put, demanding from us a harder measure of faith than any series of Bible miracles. While we willingly give heed to all natural explanations that can be soberly offered, we refuse to give up any one case in which the explanation suggested proves inadequate, and the directness of the Divine dealing—acting in lines and laws of the higher, supernatural order—is still manifest.

It will be difficult to obtain a better definition of miracle than this: 'It is God working out His purposes through the natural order in an extraordinary way.' By 'extraordinary,' meaning simply this: 'otherwise than men have any experience.'

Miracles are not temporary subversions of the Divine order, but operations in that higher line of Divine order which, as yet, is only

occasionally revealed to men—a higher order of which this earthly order is simply a harmonious specimen, or part, or illustration.

In dealing with the Scripture Difficulties connected with the miraculous, we shall find many cases in which the unusual feature is not the thing done, but the extent of the thing, the quantity of the thing, or the timeliness of its doing. In these cases we come upon the border line between the 'Miraculous' and the 'Providential'; and, perhaps, i. we had worthier ideas of the 'Providential,' that word would suffice for all such cases.

We propose to keep the following things always before us in our treatment of this section of 'Biblical Difficulties':

1. To recognise, as readily as possible, the natural agencies which God was generally pleased to use.
2. To observe carefully the unusual features in His mode of using them.
3. To trace the immediate effect of the miracle on those for whose sake it was first wrought.
4. To discover the precise moral purpose of the miracle in relation to the Divine education of the race.

We are supremely anxious to conserve the Bible miracles for all intelligent and thoughtful readers; but we are even more supremely anxious to conserve the reality of the Divine rule in this world of things and laws; and to enlarge the general conception of that rule, by showing how it uses forces which are not as yet altogether revealed to men.

It may be well to add—as is done in each of the paragraphs—some extracts from writers on various aspects of this question of the miraculous, whose views may be regarded as lying in the same plane with those to which expression has, in this Introductory note, been somewhat fully given.

### I.—*The Relations of Miracle to Nature.*

*Archbishop Trench* uses careful and precise language in the discussion of these relations: 'But while the miracle is not thus nature, so neither is it *against* nature. That language, however commonly in use, is yet wholly unsatisfactory, which speaks of these wonderful works of God as *violations* of a natural law. *Beyond* nature, *beyond* and above the nature which we know, they are, but not contrary to it. Nor let it be said that this distinction is an idle one. . . . The miracle is not thus *unnatural*, nor can it be, since the unnatural, the contrary to order, is of itself the ungodly, and can in

no way, therefore, be affirmed of a Divine work, such as that with which we have to do. The very idea of the world, as more than one name which it bears testifies, is that of *an order*; that which comes in then to enable it to realize this idea which it has lost, will scarcely itself be a disorder. So far from this, the true miracle is a higher and a purer nature, coming down out of the world of untroubled harmonies into this world of ours, which so many discords have jarred and disturbed, and bringing this back again, though it be but for one mysterious prophetic moment, into harmony with that higher. The healing of the sick can in no way be termed against nature, seeing that the sickness which was healed was against the true nature of man, that it is sickness which is abnormal, and not health. The healing is the restoration of the primitive order. We should term the miracle not the infraction of a law, but behold in it the lower law neutralized, and for the time put out of working by a higher. . . . In the miracle, this world of ours is drawn into and within a higher order of things; laws are then at work in the world, which are not the laws of its fallen condition, for they are laws of mightier range and higher perfection; and as such they claim to make themselves felt, and to have the pre-eminence and predominance which are rightly their own.'

*F. W. Robertson* presents the following view: 'A miracle is commonly defined to be a contravention of the laws of nature. More properly speaking, it is only a higher operation of those same laws in a form hitherto unseen. A miracle is, perhaps, no more a suspension or contradiction of the laws of nature than a hurricane or a thunderstorm. They who first travelled in tropical latitudes came back with anecdotes of supernatural convulsions of the elements. In truth, it was only that they had never personally witnessed such effects; but the hurricane which swept the waves flat, and the lightning which illuminated all the heaven, or played upon the bayonets or masts in lambent flames, were but effects of the very same laws of electricity and meteorology which were in operation at home.'

## II.—*Definitions of Miracles.*

A work, effect, or occurrence happening out of the ordinary course of Providence, or effected by suspension of natural or physical laws.

A Divine interposition or exercise of Almighty power.

Works involving a temporary suspension of the known laws of nature; or a deviation from the established constitution and fixed order of the universe; or, perhaps, more correctly, of that depart-

ment of the universe which constitutes our own system—whose established order and laws we are capable, to the full extent requisite for our purpose, of ascertaining.—*Wardlaw.*

Such a control of natural causes as bespeaks the intervention of a cause to which they are all secondary and obedient.—*Dr. Robert Vaughan.*

A miracle is a work, event, or junction of events out of the course of nature and beyond the power of man.—*Professor W. Griffiths.*

A miracle is a manifestation to man of the voluntariness of power.—*F. W. Robertson.*

A miracle is an abridged word which admonishes us that Deity is there.—*Vinet.*

### III.—*The Value of Miracles as Evidence.*

This we have not found more calmly or more wisely treated anywhere than by *Frederick Myers* ('Catholic Thoughts,' pp. 276-280): 'Of all kinds of external evidences that of miracles has been most unduly exaggerated, and a weight has been made to rest upon it which it now seems to many ill-calculated to bear, and which, judging from the Bible alone, it could scarcely have been intended to bear. And if this be true, it is surely wise for all who have been committing to it much of the faith of others, or of their own, to re-examine from time to time the degree of the stability of their dependence.

'Doubtless those objections which resolve themselves into the denial of the possibility of miracle are unreasonable. They proceed on an assumption of a knowledge of the powers and purposes connected with man's history, which no one can show that he possesses or can possess; and also on that of the spiritual world being governed by laws strictly analogous to those by which the material world is governed. But the modes of God's operation can only justly be regarded by us as infinite: and in the small portion of the spiritual world with which we are acquainted, there are more things seemingly miraculous than things that we can bring into the sequence of cause and effect. All will and all original thought are for us miraculous; whatever, indeed, is spontaneous must ever seem to us supernatural. And thus there can be no conclusive antecedent objection of the metaphysical kind to the occurrence of miracles. The question is one purely historical, and to be decided by testimony. But at the same time it must be acknowledged that most cultivated minds have a strong disposition to object to any interference with the laws of nature, either by spirit or otherwise, in any particular case, and more

especially when the preternatural is exalted as more Divine than the natural. And for those who have been taught to trust much in spiritual things to natural analogies, so strong is the analogy of nature against any miraculous interference with its laws by the Great Lawgiver, that this state of mind is so reasonable that it may fairly be said, that belief in the existence of miracle can for them only justly be demanded on the production of evidence for its occurrence very much more weighty than for that of any historical fact. And objections to this evidence may often be of great weight when drawn either from moral considerations respecting the nature and purpose of the asserted miracle, or from those critical considerations which are connected with all personal and documentary proof. And it should be borne in mind that the burden of proof lies always on those who assert the occurrence of the miracle; no preliminary burden of disproof on those whose belief in it is demanded. And then, too, let us remember that it is not obviously just to expect or require that the same effect should be produced on any mind by the mere record of a miracle that might fairly be expected or required from one witnessing the miracle itself. For it requires a very strong faculty of historic imagination to be much affected by the mere record of a miracle, and while we by no means theoretically disbelieve it, we may not at the same time be able so vividly to apprehend it as to believe it influentially.

‘And then, again, we may consider whether the merely historical evidence for the credibility of the documents which contain the records of the Biblical miracles is very much greater than that of any ordinary historical documents. For the evidence for the credibility of the Sacred Books depends for a large measure of its conclusiveness on moral considerations; and, if this be so, then if we introduce moral considerations largely into our data for establishing the credibility of the documents upon the evidence of which we are called upon to believe the miracle, we may justly also be allowed to introduce moral considerations into our data for estimating the credibility of the miracle itself. And if we do this, we shall find that ultimately we come to the result that the revelation supports the miracles as much as the miracles support the revelation.’

*Professor W. Griffiths* says: ‘Miracles indicate superhuman *knowledge* or *power*; else they do not deserve the name, and must be traced to artifice or chance. But miracles do not in themselves prove the moral quality, much less the divinity, of the source whence they spring. Our safeguard against deception is, partly the scale on

which the work is done, but chiefly the moral influence which accompanies it. The question, Can miracles in any case compel belief of doctrine? is curious rather than practical. It does not come before us in connection with the wonders of the Bible, and may be banished to the domain of those subtleties which have nothing to do with the duties of life. The Scripture miracle is closely allied to some spiritual truth that speaks for itself. In revelation we have to deal with the sign as clothed with instruction, and are not bound to determine what might be its effect if it stood naked and alone.

‘According to Scripture, therefore, miracles are in themselves neither useless nor of supreme authority. The sensuous does not override or supplant the spiritual, but acts as its handmaid only. The proof from signs, though necessary, is not absolute, and leaves room for appeal to the court of intellect and moral affection, the ultimate tribunal. The evidence is of a mixed order; the word and the token go together, and accomplish between them what would be impossible to either by itself.’

## Jacob and the Angels.

GENESIS xxxii. 1, 24 : 'And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.' 'And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.'

**Difficulty.**—*If these statements are historical, they involve miraculous interventions. If they describe mental and spiritual visions, they are true to nature, and there is no room for miracle.*

**Explanation.**—It is quite true that visions may take extraordinary forms, and be remarkably vivid ; to the person receiving them even seeming to be real ; and yet, because they take no place in the world of fact, they cannot be regarded as miraculous. It is not beyond, or otherwise to, the natural order, that God should have direct access to man's mind, and speak to him through his thoughts and imaginations. St. Paul speaks of 'visions and revelations of the Lord,' without regarding them as miraculous. We are familiar with the strange combinations and the dramatic situations of our dream-times, when the will no longer controls the selections from the passing mental associations ; and it is in the regular order of nature that God's will should, when He may please, guide the selections and combinations, and so give visions which should be revelations.

We may, however, hesitate to class the latter case of Jacob's wrestling with such Divine visions. The sight of the ladder and the moving angels was clearly a night-vision. The sight of angel-defenders at Mahanaim was very probably a day-vision. And, on the face of it, we should certainly expect to regard the wrestling scene as a night-vision ; and we are only checked by the very strange fact that, after it, Jacob is said to have 'halted,' or 'limped,' as if he had suffered some physical injury in the course of an actual bodily struggle.

Almost universally the scene at Mahanaim is recognised as a *vision*. 'In a dream he saw the angels encamped on each side of him, to assure him of protection against his brother.'

Many commentators regard the wrestling at Peniel as an allegory ; and some see in it an actual presence of an angel, or Divine messenger, in human form. On the whole the view supported by *Dr. C. Geikie* may be preferred. He says : 'It is not necessary to materialize the scene ; for the soul is the true sphere of that wrestling which secures spiritual blessing. Nor does even the halting on his thigh involve any physical struggle, though it implies miraculous

agency. Its lesson is only an enforcement of what had preceded—that human policy is no safe reliance, but that he must trust in God. The mighty struggle was that of God with the still resisting evil of his nature; a struggle which cannot be spared anyone destined to high spiritual ends, and conscious of being so.’

On that strain of the sciatic nerve, which involved Jacob’s lameness, and which *Geikie* thinks necessarily implies miraculous agency, *Keil* makes a suggestion which commends itself as reasonable: ‘Soul-struggles in vision might present themselves under the form of bodily labour and wrestlings of the soul, since in the vision the whole spiritual process is represented in pictures; and, further, such a struggle may even produce bodily effects, as here the lameness of Jacob’s thigh.’

It is probable that all soul-struggles are accompanied by more or less severe bodily strainings; and in this connection we can but remember the strange sweating of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Such answering physical strain to Jacob’s mental agonies will quite sufficiently explain the injury done to his nerve. The more true this scene is felt to be to the *spiritual* nature of man, the less shall we need to add to it any miraculous elements.

We are not prepared to accept the view of this scene which represents it as a subsequently fashioned legend, created to give an external form to a great and mysterious spiritual struggle; but as that view needs to be taken into thoughtful consideration, and may be treated with all due reverence for Biblical authority and inspiration, we give the passage in which *Ewald* deals with it. After describing the peculiar anxiety of Jacob just at this time, which leads him to consecrate all his powers in solemn and urgent supplication to his God, he says: ‘It is a happy conception of the later historian, to introduce just at this moment of Jacob’s most torturing suspense, when his early treachery towards Esau returned suddenly in fearful retribution upon his soul, his wrestling with the Angel; the answer, as it were, to the prayer immediately before. . . . Much, it is true, Jacob has already gained; yet precisely that which he formerly gained from his brother, he holds as yet on a merely human tenure—the right of the cunningest and the strongest, rather than by the Divine right of pure aspiration and spiritual conquest. And yet man knows no real or unalienable possession but that which he has won rather from God than from man, and has thus made a part of his very life and soul. The ordinary struggles of youth, exciting rather than decisive, and prompted for the most part by mere passion, are

followed inevitably by the final and decisive struggle with the Gods themselves ; and he only who fails not in this can win for himself the Divine blessing, which brings with it true possession and enduring prosperity. So in this critical night Jacob is met unawares by a mighty wrestler, and forced to wrestle with the unknown and mysterious visitor ; and the wrestling lasts without interruption the whole night long. . . . Now is accomplished the true spiritual triumph of the great hero, made a new man through such superhuman conflicts ; though, as the legend finely concludes, he receives a lameness, a memento of the mortal combat he has passed through, and a reminder of past weakness ; as if the moral deformity of "the crafty" had passed into the body, and were henceforth to attach to that only. Many old materials, doubtless, have been worked up into this conception : the popular belief in fearful nightly phantoms vanishing with the dawn ; the easy change of interpretation given to the old name Israel (God's Wrestler), as denoting one who had striven *with*, and therefore, perhaps, even *against* God ; also, no doubt, some ancient notion of this patriarch as *limping*, connected with the idea of his *craftiness* and *crookedness* ; and the localization of the night-scene on the river Jabbok (as if this name signified "River of Wrestling"), and near the place called Peniel—all these are made to fit in well with these stories, and the whole episode is then interwoven most harmoniously with Jacob's history.'

*F. W. Robertson* well says that 'the most honest and simple way is to confess that we cannot understand the historical fact ; but this need not prevent our receiving the underlying spiritual truths—the truth of God's guidance and protection, the truth that the struggle to know and to feel after God is the conflict of our whole life.'

## Jonah in the Whale's Belly.

JONAH i. 17 : 'And the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.'

**Questions.**—*Is the strictly historical character of this narrative well assured ? And can any explanations be given which at all relieve the extraordinary character of the miracle ?*

**Answer.**—The presumption is certainly in favour of the historical character of the Book of Jonah. There are other references to this prophet, and our Lord alludes to him as a real person, and assumes the miraculous character of his preservation. It is, indeed, possible that it may be an imaginative creation, in the nature of a parable,

or picture-teaching of moral truth ; but if so, it stands alone in Scripture, and is the only instance of such a mode of composition. The only work that could possibly be compared with it is that of Job, which may, perhaps, be regarded as a philosophical discussion, for which the machinery is found in the details of an ancient legend.

But, regarded as *bonâ fide* history, it may be permissible to recognise that it is given to us in poetical form, and strict literalness of description is not to be looked for. If we may suppose that Jonah wrote the accounts some time after these events occurred, we can quite understand that a halo of poetry and mystery had gathered round the scenes, and he could only record them as they were glorified in his feeling. The absolute plain bare facts it would now be impossible for us to recover.

Explanations of Jonah's preservation have been offered from two distinct points of view. Strongly holding the miraculous character of the transaction, some yet seek to relieve the strain of the narrative, and to answer objectors, by showing that creatures are found in the Mediterranean which are capable of swallowing and retaining a man entire. But no explanations can relieve the mystery of the retention of life for so long a time under conditions so absolutely destructive to life.

Others seek for natural or semi-natural explanations, and either regard the translation *great fish* as incorrect, or look upon the description as a poetical representation of some form of remarkable rescue.

Explanations offered from a strictly rationalistic point of view we do not care to give, as with such we can have little sympathy. But elucidations which are based on the reverent study of God's Word, and supported by adequate illustration and proof, deserve our very careful consideration. *John Bellamy*, an original and suggestive student of the Old Testament in the original language, thinks the account of Jonah can be relieved of its miraculous features by a more exact apprehension of the Hebrew terms that are used. As his ideas are not at ready command, and are only briefly alluded to in the usual commentaries, they may be given somewhat fully.

The words *daag* and *dagah* are generally chosen to mean a great fish, or some sea-monster ; *dag* is also applied to whatever appertains to the profession of *fishing* ; as to *fishermen* (Is. xix. 8)—to things that are necessary at sea, to *house* the fish, such as *boats*, *barges*, *coasters*, and is written in this sense by the most learned Rabbis in

their writings. The word is not used in this verse to mean a *fish*, but to describe the nature of the business done in those vessels, which was that of *fishing*; and this, according to the most learned Jewish Rabbis, is the true and literal meaning of the word. See *Lingua Sacra*, under *dag*, where the words *besiroth daugah* (in Amos iv. 2), which are translated in the English Version *fish-hooks*, are truly translated *fishing-vessels*.

The learned lexicographer says: 'This in the English translation is *fishing-hooks*. But, after the most strict examination, I cannot find any of the commentators or lexicographers of note espouse this sense (see Jarchi, Kimchi, Jonathan, and Buxtorf), who are decidedly unanimous that the true meaning of the words is *fishing-vessels*; and the learned Abarbanal is also of a similar opinion. See also the Chaldee, under *dagah*: "*and your daughters in the fisherman's ship*" (Targ. Jona).' And in *Talm. Heb.* it denotes a covered boat or small sloop. '*He that sells the ship, sells the cock-boat*' (Bava Bathra, ch. v.).

Secondly, the word *lebalang* is rendered *to swallow*; it also, in various places, means *to destroy*; but by a critical examination we shall find that it has no such meaning in this passage, and that an improper word has been chosen in the authorized translation. For, notwithstanding it is rendered *to swallow* in various places of Scripture, we also find that it is expressed differently according to idiom, and the obvious meaning of the writer; yet all variations of expression must always partake of the nature of the root of the word in a nearer or more remote sense. In Is. xxviii. 4, it is rendered '*he eateth up*.' In Gen. xli. 7, 24, '*devoured*.' In Is. xxv. 7, '*covered*.' In Num. xxiv. 20, marg., '*destroy*.' But it is possible to destroy without *eating* or *devouring*; and it is also possible to *cover*, *conceal*, or *hide* without *devouring*, *destroying*, or *swallowing*.

This word *lebalang* must necessarily mean to *remove* or *banish*; it is said in Ps. lv. 9, '*Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues*.' But it is plain that the result of this destruction would be contrary to reason, for if the people were destroyed, there would be no necessity to *divide their tongues*. The sacred writer here makes an allusion to the confusion or dividing of tongues, or the doctrines of religious sects, at Babel, which caused them to be *removed*. This verse reads, '*Remove, O Lord, divide their tongues*.'

There is another passage which shows that the word *balang*, which is translated *swallow*, is to be truly translated by *remove* or *banish*. See Job x. 8, '*Yet thou hast destroyed me*'; this is as it stands in

the Authorized Version ; but though Job was then 'removed' or 'banished' from his tabernacle, and his patriarchal rule over the land of Edom, yet he was not 'destroyed.'

The word *megnee* in Chaldee means the belly or inward part of anything to which it is applied. This is the clear meaning in Talmud and Rabbinical Hebrew.

Thus it appears from the proper translation of these passages—the rational series of the narrative—the customary usage of the words among the ancient people, and the opinion of the above-named eminent Rabbinical writers, that the Chaldee word *dagah*, which has been rendered a *fish*, was meant by the sacred writer to signify a covered *boat* or *skiff*; and the word *lebalang*, which has been rendered to *swallow*, literally means to *remove* from place to place.

The verse reads then agreeably to reason, as it is in the original, without supposing impossibilities, thus: 'Now the Lord had prepared a great barge to remove Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly (hold) of the barge three days and three nights.'

It appears that the ship in which Jonah embarked was bound to the port of Tarshish, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and the mariners, having put Jonah in the boat, attempted to pull him ashore, but the sea being tempestuous, they could not. Finding it impossible to land him, they then returned to the ship, leaving Jonah in the boat at the mercy of the waves ; in which perilous situation he was three days and three nights.

As representing those who hold to the historical and miraculous character of the incident, *Dean Payne Smith* wisely says: 'In an age when the advance of science has made us careful not to accept any facts but such as are carefully verified, the preservation of Jonah alive in the belly of a fish beneath the waters for more than twenty-four hours is sufficiently startling. The real point, however, for those who believe that God has deigned to authenticate His revelation by miracles is, whether there is such a reason for this miracle as justifies us in receiving it as a matter of faith.'

All the well-known Bible writers labour to reduce the miraculous element in the incident within the narrowest possible limitations. And they succeed in showing that fishes large enough are found in the Mediterranean ; that they can swallow a man whole ; that it is quite possible for them to cast up again whole what they swallowed ; and that, if Jonah retained life, the digestive processes of the creature would not affect him, for the animal stomach has no power on living substances. But nothing can remove the miraculous character of

the fact, that life was retained in circumstances which human experience declares to be absolutely destructive.

There are three ways in which the narrative of Jonah's preservation may be reasonably dealt with. (1) It may be accepted as an imaginative and poetical description of some remarkable and gracious Providential preservation. (2) Or it may be regarded as an historical account of the casting loose of Jonah in the ship's boat, which is obscured from view by the mistaken translation of the Authorized Version. (3) Or the miraculous character of the incident may be fully recognised; it may be seen that God used ordinary natural agencies so far as they would go towards effecting His purposes, and controlled them, and supplemented them by direct miraculous agencies. Either of these views may be taken by reverent men, who jealously guard the truth of God's supreme, direct, almighty, ever-present control of the affairs of men, whose *providences* in every age are more or less *miracles*, involving combinations and arrangements that are unusual and Divine.

Prebendary Huxtable, in the *Speaker's Commentary*, says: 'But amongst various possibilities which offer themselves, we are wholly incapable of determining what the actual fact was, either in respect to the part of the animal in which the prophet was imprisoned, or as to the particular kind of marine creature which was selected for the purpose. It is enough that we are able to show that the sea is provided with a variety of inhabitants already known to us, and there may well be others as yet unknown, from among which the Almighty, without having recourse to any new exercise of creative power, might call forth an individual fish for the strange office here assigned to it.'\*

\* *Herodotus* tells a story which singularly resembles that of Jonah. We give it in an abridged form: 'Arion, the Mithymnæan, who, in the days of Periander, King of Corinth, resided for some time in that city, is said to have been carried to Tœnarus on the back of a dolphin. He went to Italy, and there acquired a large fortune, apparently by the exercise of his unrivalled talents as a harpist. Wishing to return to Corinth with his wealth, he embarked at Tarentum in a Corinthian vessel; but as soon as they were out at sea, the sailors determined to murder him for the sake of his money. Perceiving their intention, he offered them all he had to save his life, but the men were determined to be rid of him. Reduced to extremity, he entreated that they would at least allow him to put on his most valuable dress, and also permit him to give them a specimen of his musical powers, promising that as soon as he had finished he would destroy himself. They complied, retiring to the centre of the ship, while he made his arrangements. Having dressed to his taste, Arion stood with his harp upon the side of the vessel, where he sang them a quick and spirited song, and then leaped into the sea. The ship pursued her course to Corinth; but Arion, so the fable relates, was taken up by a dolphin, and carried on its back to Tœnarus. He hastened away at once to Corinth, and told his strange adventure to Periander, who would not believe him until he was confronted by the sailors with whom he had sailed, who, when they saw him, confessed their crime.'

## Talking Serpents.

GENESIS iii. 1: 'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'

**Question.**—*Is it necessary to find in this the historical record of what was said, miraculously, by a talking animal; or may we see the familiar form of poetical figure and legendary narrative?*

**Answer.**—There would be no difficulty whatever felt in recognising the poetical and figurative character of this narrative, if it were found in an ordinary ancient book; but we have allowed ourselves to think that everything found in the Scriptures must be strictly *historical*, because it is *inspired*. But that view will not bear examination or criticism. If God is pleased to reveal Himself and His will to men, He is free to use any of those methods by which man can communicate his mind to his fellow-men. God is not limited to the use of history; He may use poetry; He may use philosophy; there is no reason why He should not use fable and legend, which really are nothing more than teaching by picture. No teacher of morals by means of fable or legend is ever supposed to assert that his creations are true to historical fact; they are what they profess to be—imaginative creations, more or less probable in their form, embodying and conveying to men's minds some valuable truth or principle; and the shape of the creation is decided by the knowledge and sentiment of the age for which the picture is made.

We may distinctly claim the 'legendary' as one of the forms under which Divine revelations may have been made in past ages; and we may properly set ourselves upon the endeavour to understand how, through these older legendary forms, important truths have been conveyed and preserved for all the generations.

There is only one objection to the legendary, as a mode of revelation or teaching, which specially claims our attention. It is said that it is unworthy as an instrument for God to use, because it is *not true*. But that depends on what we understand by 'the true.' A thing may be true to *life*—it may have happened; though it is not true to *fact*, for it never has happened. A thing may be true to imagination and thought, which has never gained formal realization. There is, however, a more precise and complete answer—the legendary is not presented in the Scriptures as true, in the sense of being *true to fact*. We accept it as legend; the imaginative setting of moral

events, moral struggles, that cannot be stated in bald terms, that must be suggested by strong figure, because they cannot be precisely described. 'God of old time spoke unto the fathers by divers portions and in *divers manners*,' and we need find no difficulty in recognising that one of the *manners* was the legendary.

Following out this line, it becomes plain that we need not find the miraculous in this account of the serpent talking to the woman. The thing told us in and by the pictured scene is that a struggle went on in the mind of Eve between the desire to indulge the senses and the duty of restraining the senses within the known limitations of the Divine command. Paint that struggle, so that others may see it to be just the struggle going on in their own natures, and the picture we paint cannot be a more suggestive and effective one than that which we find given us in connection with the above passage.

In a very valuable series of sermons by the Rev. Johnson Barker, LL.B., entitled *Forbidden Fruit ; or, Sermons on Temptation*, the views we have indicated receive eloquent expression. He says : ' Now, there are three possible ways of reading this story of the Fall. It may be read as history ; in every sentence of it literally true. It may be read as poetry ; true, but not literally true : true as Bunyan's " Pilgrim's Progress " is true. Or it may be read as history blended with poetry ; the historic facts of an actual occurrence, and a genuine experience, partially veiled under the thin transparency of imaginative form. It is in this third way that I think it should be read. The man and woman innocent, yet frail and temptable. The Tempter. The Temptation. The Fall. All this is history. But the form of the temptation through a serpent and the fruit of a forbidden tree—this surely is not history. It is only the poetic clothing or rendering of some profound spiritual and supernatural truths which, quite possibly, could not be otherwise conveyed. And I know of nothing either in the Scriptures or out of them to compel us to read this part of the story in any other way. " The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life. " To insist on a close adhesion to the letter in every word and syllable of a narrative like this would be to kill the faith of many, and to make them blind to the spiritual teaching it contains. These things narrated are not *literally* true ; they are true only *symbolically*. True in their spiritual meaning to every human experience I believe they are, but not true as the record of actual historical facts.

' If in any other Oriental book we read of a tree of knowledge bearing forbidden fruit, and hiding in its leaves a talking, tempting serpent, we should never think of reading it as other than a poetic

rendering of the truth it was designed to teach, and that truth would be no less true to us because it pleased the writer to put it in this form. Why, then, should any man insist that that must be literal in Scripture which he would never for a moment dream of thinking literal if he met with it elsewhere ?

Attempt has been made to get over the difficulty of a reasoning and talking serpent, by the supposition that Satan was the actual tempter, and the serpent only his agent or instrument. But *Mr. Barker* well replies to this by saying 'it is a theory which receives no warrant from the narrative itself ; it is imported into it from without, and for it, so far as I know, there is no Scriptural authority ; and when, in order to explain a narrative, you begin to intrude ideas of your own, which do not necessarily belong to it, you have then surely ceased to read it literally.'

Whether an animal spake, or a devil spake by an animal, or neither animal nor devil spake, the struggle must in reality have been carried on *within Eve's mind*. We have represented in the narrative her thoughts, which she followed until they led her astray. In her we find the struggle of the seen and unseen, of feeling and faith, of dependence and independence. The knowledge of good and evil implies just this—the fancied ability to go alone, apart from the Divine guidance. Ability to see on all sides, and so to watch and guard efficiently one's own life. So her taking the fruit of this tree is figurative of just this, which is the very essence of sin for the dependent creature—*taking life into one's own hands*. This was Eve's transgression and evil. She fell by yielding to the senses, Adam fell by yielding to the passions and affections.

Perhaps what is best said on this difficult subject is said by *Dean Payne Smith*: 'The leading point of the narrative is that the temptation came upon man from without, and through the woman. Such questions, therefore, as whether it were a real serpent, or Satan under a serpent-like form, whether it spake with a real voice, and whether the narrative describes a literal occurrence or is allegorical, are better left unanswered. God has given us the account of man's temptation and fall, and the entry of sin into the world in this actual form ; and the more reverent course is to draw from the narrative the lessons it was evidently intended to teach us, and not enter upon too curious speculations. We are dealing with records of a vast and hoar antiquity, given to man when he was in a state of great simplicity, and with his intellect only partly developed, and we cannot expect to find them as easy to understand as the pages of modern history.'

## Proposed Identification of the Manna.

EXODUS xvi. 4, 15: 'Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or no.' 'And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, What is it? for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, It is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Efforts have been made to prove that the substance known as manna is an ordinary product of desert districts, and that consequently the miraculous character of this daily provision for the Israelites cannot be maintained; but it would still seem that if the substance itself was not in its nature miraculous, its mode of coming, its continuance, and its Sabbatic conditions certainly were.*

**Explanation.**—This subject is so important for its own sake, and as a specimen of a large character of miracles, that it may properly receive careful and elaborate treatment. We need to understand clearly that the miraculous element in any event or incident may be simply the element of *time*, or of *quantity*, or of *mode*. That lesson is taught us in our Lord's miracle of multiplying the loaves. The increase was bread, even as the original loaves were bread. It was not a miracle of making some new substance; it was a miracle of time and of quantity. So, if it can be shown that manna is a familiar natural product, we are still left free to recognise Divine intervention in the times of its coming and not coming, its quantity, and its use in teaching the spirit of trustful dependence on God.

One preliminary remark should be made. There is no good reason for the assumption so often made, that the manna constituted the entire food of the Israelites during their forty years' training. A little consideration will serve to assure us that it simply took the place relative to other food which is usually taken by bread. The Israelites had the milk and flesh of their cattle, such herbs as would quickly grow in the neighbourhood of their temporary settlements, and certain natural products of the desert which are known to form an important part of the food of the Bedouins.

It will be well to describe the various natural substances which have been proposed as identical with the manna, and the fact that there are several indicates how much uncertainty attaches to the matter. The Scriptural description is not precise enough to admit of any accurate comparisons.

*Duns* tells us of two plants which have been named as the source of the manna. One of these, the *Alhagi*, or camel's thorn (*Manna Hebraica*), abounds in the Sinaitic desert, of which it is a native.

It is also common in the Egyptian desert. In summer the so-called manna exudes in small drops from its leaves, and falls to the ground. The other is the tamarisk or tarfa tree (*Tamarix gallica*, var. *manifera*), a native of the Eastern deserts. The exudation is caused by the puncture of an insect (*Coccus maniparus*). The puncture is made in the tender branches and twigs, and from this the saccharine matter known as manna flows at irregular periods. Sometimes over a wide area no exudation takes place for a period of four or five years. This is not to be confounded with the manna of commerce, a substance yielded by one of the Oleaceæ—the *Ornus*, or manna-ash, which contains the principle known to chemists as *mannite*. The exudation of the tamarisk is sugar; it does not contain mannite. It is found in shining drops on the twigs and branches. What falls upon the sand is said not to be gathered. It has the appearance of a gum, is of a sweetish taste, and melts when exposed to the sun or the fire. The Arabs consider it a great delicacy, and the pilgrims prize it highly. A very small quantity—and that only at a particular time of the year, which is not the time when the manna first fell—is now afforded by all the trees of the Sinai peninsula; and *Kitto* adds, ‘It would be safe to say that if all the trees of this kind, then or now growing in the world, had been assembled in this part of Arabia Petræa, and had covered it wholly, they would not have yielded a tithe of the quantity of gum required for the subsistence of so vast a multitude.’ The whole quantity now produced does not exceed 600 or 700 pounds.

*Canon Rawlinson* gives a further description of this tamarisk-manna: ‘It is comparatively a dry substance, is readily shaken from the leaves, and consists of small yellowish-white grains, which are hard, and have been compared to coriander-seed by moderns. The name “manna” attaches in the East to this substance, which is employed both as a condiment and as a laxative. The special points in which it differs from the manna of Scripture are: its confinement to certain trees or bushes; its comparative permanency, for it “accumulates on the leaves”; and its unfitness for food.’ It is also found only in the months of July and August, and not during the whole year.

*Rawlinson* also tells of a substance known as ‘air-honey.’ A deposit from the air, which falls indifferently on trees, stones, grass, etc., and is generally thick and sticky like honey, but under certain circumstances is ‘concreted into small granular masses.’ It has been described by Aristotle, Pliny, Avicenna, Shaw, Forskal, and others. It is collected by the Arabs, and eaten with their unleavened cakes

as a condiment. It so far resembles the manna that it comes with the dew, is spread upon the ground generally, and melts when the sun's rays attain a certain power. But it is never found in large quantities; it does not fall for more than two months in the year; and it is wholly unfit to serve as man's principal food, being more like honey than anything else. Probably this 'air-manna' is a fanciful creation, and the substance so named is really one of the tree exudations.

*Dr. C. Geikie*, quoting from *Ritter*, makes quite a fresh addition to the claimants for identification with the manna. *Hugh Macmillan* also mentions this substance in his *Footnotes from the Page of Nature*:

'There is an edible lichen which sometimes falls in showers several inches deep, the wind having blown it from the spots where it grew, and carried it onwards. In 1824, and in 1828, it fell in Persia and Asiatic Turkey in great quantities. In 1829, during the war between Persia and Russia, there was a great famine at Oroomiah, south-west of the Caspian Sea. One day, during a violent wind, the surface of the country was covered with what the people called "bread from heaven," which fell in thick showers. Sheep fed on it greedily, and the people, who had never seen it before, induced by this, gathered it, and having reduced it to flour, made bread of it, which they found palatable and nourishing. In some places it lay on the ground five or six inches deep. In the spring of 1841 an amazing quantity of this substance fell in the same region, covering the ground here and there to the depth of from three to four inches. Many of the particles were as large as hailstones. It was grey and sweet to the taste, and made excellent bread. In 1846 a great manna rain, which occurred at Jenischehr during a famine, attracted great notice. It lasted several days, and pieces as large as a hazel-nut fell in quantities. When ground and baked it made as good bread, in the opinion of the people, as that from grain. In 1846 another rain of manna occurred in the government of Wilna, and formed a layer upon the ground three or four inches deep. It was of greyish-white colour, rather hard, irregular in form, without smell, and insipid. *Pallas*, the Russian naturalist, observed it on the arid mountains and limestone tracts of the Great Desert of Tartary. In 1828 *Parroth* brought some from Mount Ararat, and it proved to be a lichen known as *Parmelia esculenta*, which grows on chalky and stony soil, like that of the Kirghese Steppes of Central Asia. *Eversmann* described several kinds of it, last century, as found east of the Caspian, and widely spread over Persia and Middle Asia. It is round, and at

times as large as a walnut, varying from that to the size of a pin's head, and does not fix itself in the soil in which it grows, but lies free and loose, drinking in nourishment from the surface, and easily carried off by the wind, which sweeps it away in vast quantities in the storms of spring, and thus causes the "manna rains" in the districts over which the wind travels.'

Now, it may freely be granted that each of these substances bears resemblance, in some points, to the Bible manna; but it must also be admitted that none of them satisfy all the requirements of the Bible description. And if we willingly recognise that 'it pleased the Creator to proceed *on the lines of nature*, so to speak, and to assimilate His new to certain of His old creations'; if we admit that 'God fed His people not with the food which belonged to other regions, but with such as appertained to the district'; still the fact remains that the miraculous stamp lies on the *timeliness, quantity, continuance, and Sabbath limitations* of the bestowment. These can have no possible explanation save that of direct and extraordinary Divine intervention, arrangement, and provision, which may properly be expressed by the term 'miracle'; no less miracle because, being continued for some forty long years, it passed into the 'providential.'

## The Natural Agencies in the Destruction of Sodom.

GENESIS xix. 24: 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.'

**Question.**—*Does the destruction of Sodom essentially differ from the destruction of cities and districts by volcano, earthquake, or tornado, which we only regard as extraordinary natural calamities?*

**Answer.**—The only difference is that, in so many cases of overwhelming calamity, we have no knowledge of the Divine intention, no such warning as makes the calamity a precise Divine education for us; but in this case of Sodom the Divine intention was revealed to some persons, so that the moral design in sending the calamity should, by them at least, be properly understood. And so, for the whole world, the case of Sodom became a specimen case, from which man might learn the direct relation which God bears to all providential calamities, and the moral missions which He makes all such disasters to execute.

If by miracle we understand 'direct Divine intervention,' then the destruction of Sodom was a miracle. If we can see that direct Divine intervention is the regular and constant method of God's dealing with our world, then the supernatural becomes the natural;

and we can understand that the natural becomes the handmaid for carrying out God's moral and educational purposes concerning the race which He has set in His world.

Scripture distinctly attributes the destruction to certain natural forces. Two are named, 'brimstone and fire,' but these may be only one. Fire from heaven leaves a smell of brimstone; and it would be quite in accordance with Eastern idiom to translate this 'brimstony fire,' by which we should understand ordinary but severe lightning. What was peculiar in the case attaches to the character of the soil, which was lighted up by the heavenly fire. Possibly the best illustration is found in the setting light to a coal mine which is full of inflammable material.

There is abundant evidence of the extraordinary character of the soil in this district of Sodom. The most recent and most interesting is furnished by *Tristram*, who, writing of the range of salt hills on the south-western shore of the Dead Sea, known as the Ridge of Sodom, says of a valley he discovered at the northern end of this ridge: 'The sides of the valley are cliffs of limestone, showing here and there on their surface traces of post-tertiary marl. But since the marl has been washed out there has been a second filling in of an extraordinary character, which is only now in course of denudation. There are exposed on the sides of the wady large masses of bitumen mingled with gravel. These overlies a thick stratum of sulphur, which again overlies a thick stratum of sand, so strongly impregnated with sulphur that it yields powerful fumes on being sprinkled over a hot coal. The layer of sulphurous sand is generally evenly distributed on the old limestone base, the sulphur evenly above it, and the bitumen in variable masses. In every way it differs from the ordinary mode of deposit of these substances as we have seen them elsewhere. Again, the bitumen, unlike that which we pick up on the sea-shore, is strongly impregnated with sulphur, and yields an overpowering sulphurous odour. Above all, *it is calcined, and bears the marks of having been subjected to extreme heat.*'

The vale of Siddim, we are told, was full of bitumen pits. Bitumen is inflammable, and when ignited by the fiery shower, the pits and the whole plain which was filled with them would burn fiercely.

*Tristram's* explanation, based upon his careful observations, is as follows: 'So far as I can understand this deposit, if there be any physical evidence left of the catastrophe which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, we have it here. The whole appearance points to a shower of hot sulphur and an eruption of bitumen upon it, which

would naturally be calcined and impregnated by its fumes ; and this at a geological period quite subsequent to all the diluvial and alluvial action, of which we have such abundant evidence. The catastrophe must have been since the formation of the wady, since the deposition of the marl, and while the water was at its present level ; therefore, probably, during the historic period. Everything leads to the conclusion that the agency of fire was at work, though not the overflowing of an ordinary volcano. The materials were at hand, at whichever end of the lake we place the doomed cities, and may probably have been accumulated then to a much greater extent than at present. The kindling of such a mass of combustible material either by lightning from heaven or by other electrical agency, combined with an earthquake ejecting the bitumen or sulphur from the lake, would soon spread devastation over the plain, so that the smoke of the country would go up as the smoke of a furnace. There is no authority whatever in the Biblical record for the popular notion that the site of the cities has been submerged. The simple and natural explanation seems to be this : that, during some earthquake, or without its direct agency, showers of sulphur and probably bitumen, ejected from the lake or thrown up from its shores, and ignited perhaps by the lightning which would accompany such phenomena, fell upon the cities and destroyed them.'

This case affords an effective illustration of the changed estimate of so-called miraculous events in different ages. In its time this destruction of Sodom was thought of as a miracle ; by the Jews it would be called a miracle ; but we can trace the operation of natural forces, and so we do not call it a miracle ; yet we see, quite as clearly and impressively as ever our fathers did, that it was a Divine ruling and overruling, in the spheres of nature, for effecting the Divine purpose in the judgment of one race for its iniquity, and the moral education of all races. 'Seen by its light, events of history, for which sufficient secondary causes may be discovered, are nevertheless shown to be direct manifestations of the Divine justice, and to have moral causes as their real basis. We lose the benefit of the teaching of the Bible if we suppose that the events recorded there were different in kind from those which take place now. A certain limited number of events were so ; but of most it is simply the curtain that is drawn back, and we see God's presence no longer veiled as with us, but openly revealed.'—*Dean Payne Smith.*

## Sun and Moon standing still.

**JOSHUA x. 13:** 'And the sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.'

**Difficulty.**—*If this is a strictly historical statement, the miracle described seems to have been much more extraordinary than any necessities of the case could have demanded. If the description be poetical in form, it may be possible to discover the precise circumstances which thus gain so intense an Eastern colouring.*

**Explanation.**—It has not been duly observed that the report is given by the writer as one of which he had no personal knowledge; and, as if he felt the extraordinary character of what he narrated, he does the unusual thing of giving his authority for his statement; and this authority we find to have been a book of historical poems, in which we might reasonably expect to find extravagant Eastern metaphors.

Very little information can be obtained concerning this book of Jasher. *Ewald* thinks it illustrated by 'historical songs, how an upright man in Israel, a Joshua or a Jonathan, should live—what glorious victories he could achieve; what glory he would gain.' It was rather a book of heroic poems than a book of Psalms. *Bishop Lowth* imagined that it was a collection of national songs, and named from the first words of it *âz yâshir*, 'then sang.'

The point of importance is, that this extract from the Book of Yashir should be compared with such poems as Moses' Song, the Song of Deborah, and the Song of the Bow, all of which we may assume were included in the book. It would perhaps be helpful to compare the extract with some that might be taken from the poems of Homer, in whose writings extravagant description abounds, but is not usually misunderstood, as if it represented historical fact. All poets' facts are facts idealized and glorified.

Almost universally it is now recognised that the description was given when it was supposed that the sun went round the earth, which it does not, it only appears to do. And it has arrested attention that if the sun were retained there could be no work for the moon also to do at the same time. If all that is meant is that there was an unusual extension of after-glow, or a dispelling of a storm cloud from one quarter of the heavens, then the aid of the moonlight may have been useful.

Earnest studies of this subject have been made by those who

cherish the utmost reverence for God's Word, and hold firmly the truth of Divine and miraculous intervention in human affairs, for high moral purposes; and we propose to give some summaries of their explanations as likely to be at once more interesting and more satisfying than any restatement of the modern case that we might ourselves make.

In a work on *Bible Difficulties* by a Roman Catholic writer, which came into our hands some years ago, we found the following passage: 'The sun was over Gibeon, or in the east—the moon in the Valley of Ajalon, or in the west. So that at the time of Joshua's prayer to Jehovah—not command to the sun—he had a long day before him, and therefore no present fear of failing light. The simple facts of the case were these. The Israelitish army made a forced march from Gilgal to Gibeon in the night, hoping to arrive before daylight, so as to attack the investing Amorites suddenly in the darkness, and defeat them more easily in the panic that would ensue. This plan was in danger of failing, for as the advancing force approached Gibeon the day began to break. Then it was that Joshua appealed to God for aid. But the aid he sought was that of prolonged darkness; hence his prayer was that "the sun might be obscured and the moon also," by the great storm which so powerfully aided the Israelitish attack.'

We can but admire the boldness and simplicity of this explanation, while we admit that it has not received general acceptance. The more elaborate treatment may be represented by the careful work of Dr. S. Cox, which may be regarded as giving the view of the passage which is now largely accepted.

On the Gibeonites appealing for help, nothing loth, Joshua seized the opportunity of encountering the hostile kings. As the need was sharp and pressing, he made a forced march, traversing in a single night the space between Gilgal and Gibeon, a distance which on a previous occasion it had taken him three days to cover—so bent was he on striking a sudden blow which might break the hostile confederation to pieces before it gathered its full strength. The five kings of the Amorites and their combined host, taken at unawares, were unable to stand the onset of Joshua's 'mighty men of valour.' They broke, and fled up the western pass, 'the way that *goeth up* to Beth-horon.' Up the weary length of this steep difficult pass the flying host had to toil, chased by their eager foes, and suffering a great slaughter, till they reached the hamlet of Upper Beth-horon at the crown of the pass.

When the pursuing army of Israel reached this point, the summit

of the pass, a broad and noble scene would open before them, extending even to the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. But, doubtless, they would cast but a rapid glance on the *distant* scene. That which would most attract their eyes would be the rough steep road, heavy with loose stones and shale, broken at intervals with sharp upturned edges, and again by smooth slippery sheets of rock, which led down to Lower Beth-horon, and over which their discomfited enemies were flying in wild disorder, amid the horrors of a tropical storm. For it was as the Amorites turned the crest of the pass, 'in the *going down* to Beth-horon,' that they met a fierce tempest driving up from the sea; thunder, lightning, and a deluge of hail storming down on their broken ranks, the Lord casting down great stones upon them, 'so that they were more that died of the hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.'

It must have been a weird and marvellous spectacle which burst on the panting warriors of Israel as they topped the pass. Behind them lay the hills which hid Gibeon from view, while from high above those hills the sun shone hotly on their backs. Beneath them the steep mountain-path sloped sharply into the valley, all thick with their scattered and disheartened foes; while, before them, black clouds of tempest rolled up from the sea, and the faint crescent moon glimmered through a rift in the clouds over the distant Valley of Ajalon. To Joshua and his captains the scene would be as unwelcome as it was strange. For here were their foes utterly at their mercy, and, if the daylight would but last, sure to be well-nigh exterminated by a terrible slaughter. But here, too, was the tempest driving up the valley from the sea, threatening to blot out the light of the sun, and, by bringing the day to a premature close, to give their foes an opportunity of escape.

At such a conjuncture as this, the natural thought of Joshua, his wish, perhaps his prayer, would be, 'O that the daylight would last, that the darkening tempest might be dispersed, and that we might *see* our foes till the victory be complete!' If this was his wish, his prayer—and we shall soon see that the Sacred Record implies no more than this—his prayer would be answered as the storm blew by, and the sun shone out through the clouds. In some way it *was* answered; for the Israelites did chase the Amorites down the pass and through the valley, smiting them with a very great slaughter.

What the exact basis of historical fact was which the sacred poet quoted by Joshua had in view when he sang of the sun and the moon as coming to the help of Israel, we cannot determine with

precision. It may be that, as he stood on the summit of the Beth-horon pass, and saw the dark tempest driving up the valley, from the sea, Joshua prayed that the light of day might not be obscured, *that the tempest might be dispersed*; and to this simple incident, if the prayer were uttered and answered, the poet may have given the imaginative and hyperbolical expression we find in his verses. Or it may be that he only had in view *the astonishing greatness of the victory*, and meant to imply that so vast an achievement demanded more than the ordinary length of an ordinary day. Or, just as Deborah, when singing of the stars that fought against Sisera, probably intended to imply that all the forces of Nature are arrayed against the enemies of God; so our poet, in singing of the arrest of the sun and the moon, may only have intended to imply, that *all the forces of Nature are for the servants and friends of God*, that when we do His will the whole universe is on our side.

*Bishop Wordsworth*, representing quite another school of Biblical critics, struggles very hard to retain the miraculous character of the events of this day, but is constrained to admit that the miracle was *local*, and the scene of it, as it were, between the longitude of Gibeon on the east and Ajalon on the west. 'The result, therefore, at which we arrive is this, that by the working of God, listening to the prayer of Joshua, the *light of the sun* was miraculously continued to Israel, *in a particular place*, and the *moon's light* was stayed from rising, while it was *night* to those who were beyond the sphere of the operation of the miracle.' *Wordsworth* notes that the words translated *the sun stood still*, are literally, *the sun was silent*, certainly a striking and suggestive difference.

*Dean Stanley* gives some sentences of *Kepler's* in relation to this subject: 'They will not understand that the only thing which Joshua prayed for, was that the mountains might not intercept the sun from him. Besides, it had been very unreasonable at that time to think of astronomy, or of the errors of sight; for if anyone had told him that the sun could not really move on the Valley of Ajalon, but only in relation to sense, would not Joshua have answered that his desire was that the day might be prolonged, so it were by any means whatsoever?'

It will suffice to give the somewhat differing suggestion made by *Herder*, to complete our summary of what may fairly be called reasonable solutions of this Biblical difficulty. He says: 'It is astonishing that this fine passage has been so long misunderstood. Joshua attacked the Amorites in the early morning, and the battle continued till night; that is, for a long day which seemed to protract

itself into night, to complete the victory. The sun and moon were witnesses of Joshua's great deeds, and held their course in the midst of heaven till the triumph was perfect. Who does not recognise this as poetry, even if it had not been quoted from the Book of Poems on Heroes. In the usual language of the Hebrews such expressions were neither bold nor unusual' (*Heb. Poesie*, vol. i., p. 237).

### The Angel-Visitors to Abraham.

GENESIS xviii. 1, 2: 'And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat in the tent-door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him.'

**Difficulty.**—*Two things require explanation in this incident: (1) The manifestation of God to Abraham, on this particular occasion, in a human form; and (2) the singular fact that the manifestation was made in three persons.*

**Explanation.**—It is important to recognise distinctly what is asserted in the above passage. 'The Lord' is said to have appeared unto Abraham; and then this appearance is described as being the approach towards the tent of three distinguished-looking strangers. We are to find in the coming of these men the coming of 'the Lord,' that is, of 'Jehovah.'

It is a singular complication of the narrative that, in verses 21, 22, it should be intimated that all three men were going towards Sodom, with the expressed intention of visiting it, and yet in chapter xix. 1 we are told that only two persons arrived at Sodom, and these are called 'angels,' not 'men.'

The explanation ready to hand, but suspiciously easy to give is, that one of the visitors was the Lord Himself, and the others were attendant ministers; that the Lord did not Himself go down to Sodom, but left His ministers to obtain the necessary information, and execute His Divine judgment. This involves that the two angels who appeared at Sodom are identified with two out of the three *men* who appeared to Abraham; but such an identification is not necessary; and we prefer to think that the manifestation of 'the Lord' to the Patriarch took a threefold human form, though it must be granted that this view very seriously increases the difficulty of our endeavour to understand the incident.

The probable reason for the appearance of Jehovah in human form on this occasion is, that it was necessary Abraham should have a profound impression of that actual personal rule of God over all the affairs of Canaan, which was one of the conditions of the covenant. God rules the world, but He does it by *agents*. God

ruled Canaan, but He did it *directly*; He did it Himself. Abraham must see him as a man ruling men. He was at this time judging the accused, and prepared to punish the guilty, and this, for Abraham and for us, must be brought out of the realm of sentiment, and presented as actual, tangible fact. Probably the chief importance of this manifestation lies in the aid it affords towards realizing the *objectiveness* of the Theocracy.

The Jewish commentators have a curious account to give of the sending of three angels, as they call them. 'No angel might execute more than one commission at a time; one of the three came to heal Abraham, the second to bear the message to Sarah, and the third to destroy Sodom.'

The true explanation seems to lie in the direction indicated by *Bishop Wordsworth*: 'In these three men was there not a mysterious shadowing forth of the Three Persons of the Undivided Trinity? And those Three Persons being coequal are called by the same name, "men," "three men," but they could not be called angels; for angel means *sent*, and the First Person of the Trinity is never said in Scripture to be *sent*. But the Son is said to be sent, and the Holy Ghost is sent. *They* may be called *Angels*; but the Father not. Perhaps, then, with reverence be it said, we have a vision of the Three Persons in this chapter; and of the Second and Third Persons in the following.'

This may seem an overstraining of the meaning, and we cannot accept the idea of a separation of the Divine Unity thus suggested. It is better to think of the two angels who came to Sodom as simple ministrants and executors of the Divine will; and it is better to say simply, with the early Christian fathers, that the three men symbolized the Divine presence of the Blessed Trinity in Unity. The Hebrew words rendered *three men* signify a *triad* of men. Such a manifestation became a kind of picture-teaching of the primary truth concerning God, adapted to the apprehension of the Patriarch and those who lived in his time. *Lange* says: 'This great manifestation of God, in the life of Abraham, is the most striking sign in the old covenant of the incarnation of God.' The incarnation, or embodiment of God, for human apprehension cannot be made in one person, or one form, it requires three persons, or three forms, if men are to realize His absolute Being, His visibility to the senses, and His recognition as an indwelling life. Men can only think of God, in His relations to them, as a three-fold Being; and it was well that this should be so strikingly shown in symbol to the great race-father.

## The Swift-growing and Swift-dying Gourd.

JONAH iv. 10 : 'Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow ; which came up in a night, and perished in a night.'

**Question.**—*Is it necessary to recognise anything miraculous in the account of the gourd as here given ?*

**Answer.**—The miraculous feature in the narrative is the timing of the incidents to fit in with the moral instruction of God's servant, and not in the incidents themselves. The sudden growth was usual, and the sudden decay was usual, if due allowance is made for the poetical form in which the narrative is given to us.

In considering this subject, the possibility that the Book of Jonah is a parable, or work of imagination, based, more or less, on some historical incident, must be duly estimated. This has been treated in a former paragraph on Jonah i. 17. So much as this may fairly be said : the instruction of God's servant through the circumstances of a plant are suggestive of pictorial teaching by fable, or imagined incident. But, on the whole, the arguments seem to favour the strictly historical character of the narrative ; and we need only say, that the actual facts were given by Jonah himself, after they occurred, and when a prophetic and poetical 'glamour' had gathered about them. We must all have observed that when we narrate actual events, in which we were personally concerned, in order to convey through them moral teachings, we cannot help 'dressing them up,' so that the bare facts get quite an imaginative clothing. No dishonour whatever is done to the Divine Word by recognising that this very natural process may be observed in the Bible narratives, which often are 'fact glorified by feeling.'

Dean Payne Smith is a safe authority for adequate explanations of the extraordinary growth and decay of this gourd. He says : 'The plant called in Hebrew *Kikanion* is really the '*Palma Christi*,' the *Ricinis Communis* of botanists. St. Jerome describes this plant as having a firm trunk, broad leaves shaped like those of the vine, and as giving a most dense shade. 'It grows,' he adds, 'with great rapidity, so that the seed rises marvellously into a shrub ; and where a few days before you saw only a small plant, you behold quite a little tree.' Elsewhere we learn that it has a hollow stem, and rises often to a height of fifteen or sixteen feet. Dr. Pusey, who has collected much valuable information both about the white shark and the palma christi, quotes also an interesting account of the manner in which it is sometimes as suddenly destroyed. 'On warm days,

when a small rain falls, black caterpillars are generated in great numbers on this plant, which in one night so often and so suddenly cut off its leaves that only their bare ribs remain.' He further notices that there is nothing in the text to imply that it was the stem that was gnawed asunder, and that the word 'worm' might be used collectively for a multitude of caterpillars.

As regards the minor point, that if Jonah had built him a booth (chap. iv. 5), he would not have needed a palma christi to shade him, Pusey further shows, that the booth which Jonah put up was such as the Jews erected at the Feast of Tabernacles; and that these, composed of slight branches, did not (effectually) exclude the sun. But we can very well imagine that, in so hot a climate, no erection of dead boughs, or even of planks, would give a shade so refreshing as green living foliage.'

*Kitto* says: 'We are not bound, in the case of the gourd, to find a plant which, without the special ordinance of the Lord's providence, should attain such growth in a night as to afford adequate shelter to the prophet's head. The Lord, however, is in all His dispensations economical of prodigies; and we are to suppose that in this instance He did not create a new plant for the occasion, or choose one of naturally slow growth. It is more in the ordinary course of even His miraculous providence to suppose that a plant naturally of rapid growth was chosen, and that this natural quickness of growth was preternaturally stimulated for the occasion.'

No gourd actually grows up in a single night, and the expression, 'which came up in a night,' or literally, 'which was the son of a night,' must be regarded as giving in strong poetic figure the fact of swift growth. It is a sort of poetical antithesis to the other expression, 'perished in a night.' The gourd is a climbing vine of rapid growth, always trained to run up trees, trellis, and temporary booths, the size of its leaves affording a pleasant shade. The fruit, though large, is not heavy, and hangs on the vines swinging and drying in the wind. It appears, however, that the gourd plant, in consequence of its light and pulpy texture, is very liable to be destroyed by grubs and worms, which attack the root, and so involve the speedy withering of the plant. *Tristram* prefers the identification with an ordinary gourd to that with the *ricinus*.

'The same God who caused the gourd to grow in a night could make a cedar do so likewise; but this would be a wide departure from the general method of miraculous interposition, which is to employ it no further than is necessary to secure the result required' (*Dr. Thomson*). *Calvin* says: 'God approaches nature when He

does anything beyond nature : this is not indeed always the case ; but generally we find that God so works as that He exceeds the measure of nature, and yet from nature does not wholly depart.'

## The Mystery of the Urim and Thummim.

• EXODUS xxviii. 30 : 'And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim ; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord : and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that this Urim and Thummim was the medium of constant miraculous communications from God ; and how did the informations or decisions furnished by it differ from those arrived at by the process of 'casting lots' ?*

**Answer.**—It cannot be said that we properly understand what this 'Urim and Thummim' was. In all accounts given us of it, there is evidently much guess-work ; and the fact that it was made a regular and orderly plan for obtaining a Divine oracle, takes it out of the class of miracles proper. It became the usual method of Divine communication for certain matters. But the removal of the miraculous feature in no way involves any weakening of our impression of the direct Divine action in the responses given. In this case we may distinguish between the extraordinary and the miraculous.

On comparison of the various references in Scripture to the Urim and Thummim, we gather that it was some material thing, separate from the breastplate, and separate from the gems on the breastplate. Probably there were two balls kept loose in the bag of the breastplate, and if so, they must have been used somewhat as pebbles may be used for casting lots. Their proper use seems to have been to gain knowledge of the Divine mind in the matter of the wars of Israel, and their responses amounted to a simple 'yes' or 'no.' There is no instance on record of their being consulted after the time of David.

There have been many suggestions made as to the form and material of this oracle, and the method in which it was consulted by the high-priest, but they may be classified under three heads. Some think that the Divine will was manifested through the Urim and Thummin by some physical effect addressed to the eye or ear. Others think that there was some ordained symbol which, when the high-priest concentrated his sight and attention on it, became a means of calling forth the prophetic gift. And yet others think that there was some

contrivance for casting lots ; and this certainly is the safest direction in which to seek for explanation.

*Dr. C. Geikie* sums up a careful criticism of the various suggestions in this way : ‘The Urim and Thummim have been supposed to refer to something analogous to an ornament worn by the president of the high court of justice in Egypt, who was necessarily a priest—a small figure composed of costly stones, which was called Truth—forming, perhaps, an image of the goddess *Tme*, whose name has been supposed by some identical with “Thummim,” though many Egyptian scholars reject this derivation. It would seem, however, as if the translators of the Greek Bible had been of this opinion, as “Thummim” is always rendered “Truth” by them. So, also, “Urim” is thought traceable to the Egyptian word for “revelation.” Hence it has been suggested that the Urim and Thummim may have been two small images—kept in the pocket of the breastplate, or hung in front it—representing “revelation” and “truth,” which in some way gave oracular answers when consulted. *M. Lenormant* has found allusions in the Assyrian tablets to a gem in a royal or priestly ring, the flashes from which were regarded as oracular. This, he fancies, may explain the nature of the Urim and Thummim. That these were in the pocket of the high-priest’s breastplate—not outside—proves, he thinks, conclusively that they could not, as *Josephus* imagines, be any of the gems in front of that ornament?’

*Philo* says that the Urim and Thummim were gems cut in the form of teraphim.

*Ewald* represents the *bag* connected with the ephod as the least comprehensible article of the high-priest’s adornment. It was a span in length, and in breadth, had four corners, and, as we distinctly know, was double. If, however, this last expression still seems ambiguous, it is fully explained by an inner side, *i.e.*, the side of the article turned towards the breast, being spoken of (*Exod.* xxviii. 26, comp. 16 ; xxxix. 19, comp. 9). What distance apart from one another the two sides of the bag were, we do not know ; but it was plainly no more than was necessary to grasp with the hand and to draw out what was preserved within. For we know further that there was something placed inside the article. It was the receptacle of the Urim and Thummim. Now, these objects, which as something placed inside must have been quite capable of being grasped in the hand, are not described either elsewhere in the Old Testament, or yet in the Book of Origins at this very place. It is also manifest from many clear tokens that the words Urim and Thummim of themselves denote nothing save the oracle, and declare nothing about its kind

or the instruments by which it was to be obtained.' Probably two pebbles of different colours were shaken as lots in the *bag*, and one of them was drawn out.

The *Speaker's Commentary* concludes a careful note thus: 'No attempted explanation seems to be more in accordance with such analogy as the history of the Israelites affords, or more free from objection, than that the Urim and the Thummim were some means of casting lots. That the Lord should have made His will known to His people by such means may indeed run counter to our own habits of thought. But we know that appeals to lots were made under Divine authority by the chosen people on the most solemn occasions. It must have been a truth commonly recognised by the people, that though "the lot was cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33).'

## The Fate of Lot's Wife.

GENESIS xix. 26: 'But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.'

**Question.**—*Is it possible to gain any satisfactory ideas concerning the miraculous judgment which so suddenly overwhelmed this woman?*

**Answer.**—As in so many cases, we must carefully eliminate from this narrative the additions which men have made to it, and the inferences which they have drawn from it. We have argued as if the Bible statement were, 'And she became *at once* a pillar of salt.' It would be much more simple and natural to read it thus: 'And she ultimately became a pillar of salt.' What we may suppose to have happened was this: her protection from the raging elements was withdrawn on account of, and as a judgment on, her disobedience and wilfulness. She was smitten and killed, and her body became encrusted with the salt deposits of the district.

In connection with those salt deposits, the fact may be noticed that, at the southern end of the Dead Sea, Gebel Usdum, a huge mountain of rock-salt, capped by gypsum and marl, about seven miles long, and from one and a half to three miles broad, hollowed out by rains and springs, sends a constant addition of brine into the lake; and this, with that which enters it in other parts, has gradually made it more than six times saltier than the open ocean. Things are soon encrusted with its salty evaporations.

*Edersheim* says: 'Tradition has since pointed out a mountain of salt, at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, as the spot where the occurrence had taken place. It need scarcely be said that, like

most traditions, which only import a disturbing element into our thinking, this also is not founded on fact.'

*Bishop Patrick* offers an account of the incident which is difficult to improve upon. 'Some of that storm which overwhelmed her country, overtook her, and falling upon her, as she stood staring about, and minded not her way or guide, suddenly wrapped her body in a sheet of nitro-sulphureous matter; which congealing into a crust as hard as stone, made her appear, they say, a pillar of salt, her body being, as it were, candied in it.'

Though no identification of any column or pillar is either possible or necessary, and those suggested are not found in likely situations, it is interesting to note a discovery made by the American Expedition. 'At Usdum, on the south-west of the lake, they discovered a pillar forty feet in height, being a great block of rock-salt, partially detached from the salt mountain that stands there. It is on a plateau 1000 feet above the sea-level. It is a tall isolated needle of rock, which really does bear a curious resemblance to an Arab woman with a child upon her shoulders.'

The death of Lot's wife may be classed among the events which are properly called 'miracles of Providence,' in which ordinary natural forces are so timed, and set in such relations, as to carry out some special Divine design.

*Lange* ventures on an explanation which altogether removes the miraculous element from the story. 'The *looking back* is plainly not more to be understood in a strict literal sense than the account that she became a pillar of salt. Female curiosity, and the longing for her home in Sodom, led her to remain behind Lot, and delay, so that she was overtaken in the destruction.' It certainly is a striking thing that our Lord uses this judgment to illustrate 'returning back,' and not merely 'looking back' (Luke xvii. 31, 32).

## The Position of the Red Sea Crossing.

EXODUS xiv. 9: 'And the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-Zephon.'

**Question.**—*Have modern researches succeeded in identifying the place of the crossing; and if so, does the identification suggest any explanations of the leading features of the narrative?*

**Answer.**—It is not to be expected that the conditions of the district should remain precisely the same as they were three thousand years ago. Recedings of tides, encroachments of sands, and denu-

ditions of hills, would alter the natural features, and the changes of dynasties, and shiftings of commerce, caravan routes, etc., would lead to the removal of populations, and the decay of towns, villages, forts, watch-towers, etc. Still, in this case, the general position so far remains the same, that a satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at.

Such a map as is found in *Speaker's Commentary*, vol. i., p. 435 ; or in *Biblical Treasury*, New Series, vol. ii., p. 72, will prove very helpful in tracing the route of the Israelites. That in the *Speaker's Commentary* marks in a very distinct way the shoal between the head of the Red Sea and the end of the southern Bitter Lake, which is now generally recognised as the scene of the crossing.

In deciding the position we must keep in mind the necessities which had to be met. A large army of men may have marched across a narrow space—like a bridge—in a few hours ; but in this case a nation, including men, women, and children ; flocks, herds, baggage, sick and infirm folk, etc., had to be conveyed across during the hours of one night, and the distance, at the lowest computation, must have been three miles ; it is variously estimated, some even suggesting six to twelve miles. It is quite certain therefore that the crossing would be over a sand bank, and not through the deep part of the Red Sea, which would have involved a perilous descent into the bottom, and a most toilsome ascent on the further side, involving serious delay in the passage. We are distinctly told that the crossing took place in the time between two tides, which would be only, at the most, from six to eight hours.

In view of the facts which seem now to be generally admitted, it is safe to believe that the crossing took place near Suez, the head of the Red Sea, at a part which is now silted up with sand (through which the Suez Canal has recently been cut), rising not more than six feet above the level of the lakes. This wide belt of sand now divides the Red Sea from the Bitter Lakes, but these were undoubtedly at one time joined together, the sea lying shallow over this sand belt, or perhaps only covering it at the rise of the tide.

Some assert that there was a known ford at this spot, but the ford would only be a narrow passage, just where the water channel was safe, and such a ford would be quite useless for such an immense host of human beings and animals. Nothing is clearer than that they must have crossed over a wide tract of hardened sand, reaching almost miles in width. The notion of their going across in a narrow procession will not stand criticism.

The most reasonable account that can be given of the circumstances is as follows. We assume, in our narration, that the whole

company of people and animals kept together under the direction of Moses. To relieve the difficulties of the narrative, some have very needlessly suggested that Moses divided the caravan at Etham, sending the flocks, servants, and women, etc., round the north end of the Bitter Lakes, and into the wilderness of Etham, while he conducted the armed Israelites southwards towards Jebel Atakah. No hint of any such arrangement is given in the Scriptures, and we can conceive of nothing more unlikely.

The entire host, possibly marshalled in five sections, started from Rameses, marched to Etham, the frontier fortress of Egypt towards the wilderness, and the starting-point for the ordinary route to Palestine. This Etham lay between Lake Timsah, and the northern end of the Bitter Lakes. At this place the strange Divine command came to change the route, turn southward, and march towards Jebel Atakah, with the Bitter Lakes lying on the left hand of the host. The encampment was made under Jebel Atakah, where the Red Sea narrowed, so as to be only from three to six miles across. The position of the encampment is marked by three names, and if we may conclude that there was a regular ford at this spot, the names may well indicate the watch-towers or fort that marked it, and the town which provided rest and shelter for those who undertook crossing the ford. Israel stretched for some distance northward close along the shores of the sea, ready to start straight across the dried sands as soon as the signal was given.

Pi-hahiroth is generally identified with Ajrud, a fortress with a very large well of good water, situate at the foot of an elevation commanding the plain which extends to Suez, at a distance of four leagues. The journey from Etham might occupy two, if not three days.

Migdol means a tower or fort, probably Bir Suweis, about two miles from Suez. Baal Zephon was nearer to Suez. These three places really represent the space over which the encampment of the Israelite host extended. Pi-hahiroth its northern part; Suez its southern; and Migdol its centre, or head-quarters. They were thus full in front of the wide sand-belt which was to be made hard and dry for them.

*Dr. C. Geikie* collects some further information on the physical features of this district. 'At the point where Suez lies, the western bank juts out in a point, to the east, so that the bay has only a breadth of two-thirds of an English mile. But, below the town, towards the south, the bank retires in a deep bend to the west, leaving a breadth of water of from three to four English miles. The

bottom of this stretch of sea consists, next the land, of sandbanks and rocky soil, firm and level, and sprinkled with sea-grass. The sandbanks run out to this from the Eastern shore, and, with the exception of a small opening, are dry at the lowest ebb, or covered with only little water. Such is the southern ford, through which, Robinson was told, the people waded at low water, though the depth, even then, was five feet, in the channel dividing the bank from north to south. This, or the ford which runs in a line with Suez, where the waters are so much narrower, may have been the spot at which Jehovah, making use, so far, of natural laws, led the Israelites safely over.'

*E. S. Poole* says: 'The most important change in the Red Sea has been the drying up of its northern extremity, "the tongue of the Egyptian Sea." The land about the head of the gulf has risen, and that near the Mediterranean become depressed. The head of the gulf has consequently retired gradually since the Christian era. The tongue of the Red Sea has dried up for a distance of at least fifty miles from its ancient head, and a cultivated and well-peopled province has been changed into a desolate wilderness. The country, for the distance above indicated, is now a desert of gravelly sand, with wide patches about the old sea-bottom, of rank marsh land, now called the "Bitter Lakes" (not those of Strabo). At the northern extremity of this salt waste is a small lake sometimes called the Lake of Heroöpolis (the city after which the gulf of Suez was called the Heroöpolite Gulf): the lake is now Birket et Timsah, "the Lake of the Crocodile," and is supposed to mark the ancient head of the gulf.'

## The Fire-Sign at the Dedication of the Temple.

2 CHRONICLES vii. 1: 'Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offerings and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house.'

**Question.**—*Should this Divine fire be distinguished from lightning? Or may we think that the ordinary natural force of electricity was used in new and surprising ways?*

**Answer.**—So much depends on whether it seems to us most honouring to God that He should bend, to the doing of His will, the things He has already created and appointed, or that He should on emergency absolutely create new forces. A fuller understanding of the wisdom and mystery of creation is, in our day, strengthening the feeling that God's honour is seen in His wonder-working *within* the spheres of natural law rather than *beyond* it; and it is probable that

the tendency, in coming years, will set more and more strongly in favour of finding 'God in Nature,' rather than 'God outside Nature.'

In this—and similar cases recorded in Old Testament history—there seems no good reason for assuming the creation of a new fire element. The electrical force, which is in the Divine control, is efficient to accomplish all the results described. We are not to assume that the fire consumed the sacrifices apart from kindling the fuel on which the sacrifices were laid. The Divine fire was the spark that set the pile alight; and what is called the glory of the Lord is the cloud of smoke which rose from the burning altar, which glowed brightly because full of the reflections of the fire. Such scenes could but be seen in the excitement of aroused religious feeling, and we are told what devout and enthusiastic men thought things to be, and felt them to be, rather than what they actually were. The Bible must be read with something of the quickened imagination and feeling which are so evident in the composition of very much of it; and due account must be taken of the fact that natural phenomena are accounted as wonderful and miraculous simply because they are not understood, and their connections with things that are understood cannot readily be traced. It is only in quite recent years that electricity, as a sublime natural force of light and life, has been at all studied; and it is now seen to be one of the most potent forces, whose power of service to man, under the development of the future, no man can possibly imagine. It may even be that the seemingly erratic agencies of earthquake and volcanic fire may be found to follow fixed laws, and when man has come to understand them, even the volcano and the earthquake may be yoked to man's service. These things are semi-miracles to us now, even as the Divine fire was of old to the Jews, simply because the laws of them are still a mystery.

The point which should be especially considered is, that God is quite as truly in the use of things that already exist, as in the creation of special things for the outworking of His purpose. And God's using of existing things in an *extraordinary* way is designed to impress on all sensitive hearts the graciousness of His using existing things in an *ordinary* way. The particular effect produced on Solomon and his nation by the descending fire need not be produced on our minds; it is enough that we learn the permanent lesson, for the sake of which the narrative is preserved, that God surely grants His acceptance, and the sense of His acceptance, to all those who faithfully endeavour to carry out His blessed will.

## Elijah's Ravens.

1 KINGS xvii. 4: 'And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.'

**Difficulty.**—*These carrion birds do not seem to be fitting agents for the supply of the prophet's daily needs; and yet the suggestion that Arabians, not ravens, are meant seems to add to, rather than relieve, the difficulties of the incident.*

**Explanation.**—If read without the present vowel points, the word translated 'ravens' may signify 'Arabians.' And if read with the present pointing, it is possible to render the word as 'merchants,' or as 'Orbites.'

To *Jerome* seems due the suggestion, that a people dwelling in the neighbourhood, and known as *Orbites*, from the town of *Orbo*, near *Bethshan*, were the real succourers of *Elijah*; but it is extremely improbable that men would take either the trouble or the risk of coming morning and evening with fresh food, when they could have left the prophet a sufficient supply to last for several days.

It is passing strange to find *Kitto* supporting the rendering 'Arbim,' Arabs, in preference to 'Orebim,' ravens; and, though we do not agree with his suggestion, it will interest our readers, and serve to illustrate how the most orthodox Biblical writers feel the importance of keeping the miraculous element within the strictest limits, and recognising the 'providential,' where the enthusiast will think he finds the miraculous. Dealing with the view that birds are intended, *Kitto* says: 'The statement in the text does not require us to suppose that the ravens with purpose and forethought brought victuals designedly for *Elijah*, and laid them before him, or presented them to him. This was not required for the object in view, and therefore was probably not done; for God does not work needless miracles. . . . It may suffice to suppose that the place to which *Elijah* had been directed to retreat, was the chosen resort of ravens, which had their nests among the trees that grew on the banks of the stream. They brought home, morning and evening, to their nests as much animal and vegetable food as sufficed not only for their own wants, but for those of *Elijah*, who secured what he required, and dressed it with the dry wood which abounds in such situations. . . . But the natural food of the raven was that which, least of all, an Israelite obedient to the law could touch. He could not eat that which died of itself; yet this is generally the case with the carrion, which forms the proper diet of the raven. Still, the food of the

raven is not exclusively carrion. Among birds there is none more omnivorous in its appetite. There is scarcely anything that comes amiss to it. . . . It is impossible to suppose that the prophet was supplied from the ordinary resources and operations of the ravens. If we admit that they were the agents through which subsistence was given to him, we must hold their agency to have been miraculous in all its circumstances, and that suitable and adequate food was daily presented by miracle twice to the notice of the ravens, which they were impelled to bear away to Elijah's hiding-place, and to drop there.'

On the identification of the so-called ravens with Arabians, or Orbim, *Kitto* says: 'Going over the list of alternatives, that of "Arabs" instead of "ravens," is probably the one that persons free from any previous bias would spontaneously select as the most probable. For ourselves, though we should not hesitate at the ravens, if quite sure that those birds are really intended, yet when the alternative is thus open, we rather incline to the Arabs—influenced, perhaps, by such a knowledge of the habits and character of that people as enables us to perceive their entire fitness to be the agents of this Providential dispensation in favour of Elijah. To us nothing seems more likely than that encampments of Arabs—who still intrude their tents at certain times of the year upon the borders, or into the unappropriated pastures of settled countries, would, at this season of drought, have been forced within reach of the brook Cherith. They were, from their condition and habits of life, the very persons to whom the secret of his retreat might be most safely entrusted. . . . When once he had eaten of their bread and meat, the great law of Arabian honour made him secure of continued support and safe from betrayal.'

It is not necessary to assume that the precise birds employed were those which are now classed under the term 'ravens'; precision of distinctions in matters of natural history is not to be looked for in the Old Testament Scriptures. To those who believe in God, there should be no difficulty in apprehending the Divine control of the instincts of the creatures. We need not unduly force language, which is expressed in Eastern poetical form, so as to suppose that with absolute regularity to the hour the birds returned with the food. Every day some birds brought supply, and as they only brought enough for the day, Elijah learnt well the lesson of daily waiting on God. Our daily bread does come from Him, whether birds be the agents in carrying it or it comes in the ordinary lines of toil.

The *Rev. C. J. Ball* gathers up all that it seems necessary to add in

the following note on the verse: 'Of the accuracy of this rendering, which is that of almost all the ancient versions and of Josephus, there can be little doubt. The singularly prosaic interpretations, substituted for this striking and significant record of miracle by some ancient and modern writers (adopting slight variations of the Hebrew vowel-points)—such as "Arabs," "merchants," "inhabitants of a city Orbi; or the rock Oreeb"—seem to have arisen simply from a desire to get rid of what seemed a strange miracle, at the cost (be it observed) of substituting for it a gross improbability; for how can it be supposed that such regular sustenance by human hands of the persecuted prophet could have gone on in the face of the jealous vigilance of the king? But it is idle to seek to explain away one wonder in a life and an epoch teeming with miracles. It is notable, indeed, that the critical period of the great Baal apostasy, and of the struggle of Elijah and Elisha against it, is the second great epoch of recorded miracle in the Old Testament—the still more critical epoch of Moses and Joshua being the first. It is hardly less idle to determine that this or that miracle is so improbable, than to introduce any difficulty of acceptance which does not apply to miracles in general.'

We may regard it significantly in favour of the 'raven' translation, that *Dean Stanley*, who always gives full attention to naturalistic suggestions, nevertheless writes on this matter thus: 'Thither, we are told, night and morning, came the ravens that frequented that one green spot, "the young ravens" of Palestine that cry to God—"the ravens" whom God feedeth, "though they neither sow nor reap"—and laid their portion of bread and flesh at break of day and at fall of evening by the side of the gushing stream.'

### The Shadow on the Dial of Ahaz.

2 KINGS xx. 11: 'And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and He brought the shadow ten steps backward, by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz.'

**Difficulty.**—*If this change in the position of the shadow involves an alteration of the sun's place in the heavens, according to the older notion, or an arrest of the earth's motion round the sun, and even a motion of the earth backwards, according to modern notions, it was a stupendous miracle, and apparently beyond the necessities of the case.*

**Explanation.**—It must frankly be admitted that the varied consequences resulting from a temporary alteration of the earth's position in relation to the sun, so as to cause a change of shadow, are too serious to allow of that as the explanation of this incident.

Nor is it necessary to resort to such an explanation. Hezekiah was not an astronomer. He did not puzzle over the method in which this phenomenon came about. For the Divine purpose, and for the encouraging of the faith of the king, it was enough that so unusual an event occurred; that no human agency was concerned in producing the effect; and that it bore direct relation to God, as being His response to His servant's prayers. We have to inquire what was sufficient to effect the desired moral result, and we need not go beyond that to assume displays of Almighty power for which there was no demand.

So far as sending back the shadow on a dial ten degrees is concerned, any mechanician could manage that by due refraction of the sun's rays. An astronomer, or, indeed, a clockmaker, could make a sundial mark any time he liked. And God could work in the same sphere, and use the same instrumentalities as men could use. The point of the incident is, that no one interfered with the dial, and so it must have been God, using such agencies as man might use, who sent the shadow back.

But it is necessary that we should understand, as far as possible, what this 'dial' was: and see what suggestions have been made in explanation of this unusual phenomenon. *Burder's* note on ancient modes of measuring time may be first given. 'At the beginning of the world it is certain there was no distinction of time but by the light and darkness, and the whole day was included in the general terms of the evening and morning. The Chaldeans, ages after the flood, were the first who divided the day into hours. Sundials are of ancient use; but as they were of no service in cloudy weather and in the night, there was another invention for measuring the parts of time by water; but that not proving sufficiently exact, they laid it aside for another by sand. The use of dials was adopted earlier among the Greeks than the Romans. It was about three hundred years after the building of Rome before they knew anything of them; but yet they had divided the day and night into twenty-four hours, though they did not count the hours numerically, but from midnight to midnight, distinguishing them by particular names, as by cock-crowing, the dawn, the mid-day, etc. The first sun-dial we read of among the Romans, which divided the day into hours, is mentioned by Pliny, as fixed upon the temple of Quirinus by L. Papyrius, the censor, about the twelfth year of the wars with Pyrrhus. Scipio Nasica, some years after, measured the day and night into hours from the dropping of water.'

The determination of the moment of noon, by the absence of

shadow cast from a wall built north and south, was well known to all Eastern people, and appears to have been introduced into the structure of the Court of Israel by King Solomon.

The possible translation of the word 'degrees' as 'steps' has led to the suggestion that a staircase in the palace of Hezekiah was made to measure the hours of the day by a shadow falling on the steps. (So Josephus and Jerome.) *Knobel* puts this suggestion in its most probable shape. He thinks the dial consisted of a column rising from a circular flight of steps, so as to throw the shadow of its top on the top step at noon, and morning and evening on the bottom step.

*Kitto* describes a sort of dial found in Hindustan, near Delhi, the construction of which would exceedingly well suit all the circumstances recorded respecting the dial of Ahaz. It seems framed to answer the double purpose of an observatory and a dial. It is a rectangled triangular figure, whose hypotenuse is a staircase, apparently parallel to the axis of the earth, and bisects a zone or coping of a wall, which wall connects the two terminating towers right and left. The coping itself is of a circular form, and accurately graduated to mark, by the shadow of the gnomon above, the sun's progress before and after noon; for when the sun is in the zenith he shines directly on the staircase, and the shadow falls upon the coping. A flat surface on the top of the staircase of the gnomon fitted the building for the purpose of an observatory.

But it must seem to simple Bible readers that anything so elaborate as this is unnecessary to the narrative, and belongs to the disposition to conjecture wonderful things when common-place things sufficiently meet the occasion. There need only have been a dial-plate, or pillar set up in the court or garden of the palace, as such dials are often set up in gardens now; and this arrangement for measuring time is so readily suggested by observation of the moving sun-shadows, that we may be quite sure it was early adopted. The word translated 'degrees' may mean lines or figures on a dial-plate of any kind, or on a pavement. A Jewish Rabbi, one *Elias Chomer*, describes the dial of Ahaz as a concave hemisphere, in the midst of which was a globe, the shadow of which fell upon several lines engraved upon the concavity of the hemisphere, and which lines are said to have been twenty-eight in number.

Writers who are most keenly alive to the traces of the miraculous in the Bible agree that we must not attempt to explain this phenomenon by any alteration of the axis, or motion, of the earth. The older commentators, almost without exception, believed in the actual

reversing of the earth's motion around its axis, simply because they did not realize what such a reversal must of necessity involve. On this point *Kitto* has the following wise note : ' Some have supposed that, to produce this effect, the earth was made to retrograde upon its axis for a space corresponding to that marked by ten degrees upon the dial. This would certainly have produced the effect intended ; but it would doubtless have produced something more. Such a reversal of the order of nature, and disturbance of the solar system, could hardly have happened without such results as would be remembered through the world to the end of time. Yet history records no such event ; and its local character is indirectly recognised in the fact, that the prince of Babylon sent to inquire respecting the wonder that is done *in the land*. Besides, in the course of human conduct, it is not deemed wise "to leap over the house to unbar the little gate ;" neither do we find that the Almighty is ever redundant in manifestations of power, but rather sparing—employing just so much power, and no more, as may be needful to produce the intended result. It is therefore not likely, judging from the analogy of the Divine operations, that the earth should be sent backward in its course to produce an effect which might be accomplished by means as sufficient, and as truly miraculous, though with less derangement to those laws on which God has established the universe, and which He does not Himself disturb without a most adequate cause.'

*Bishop Wordsworth* observes : ' It is not said by the sacred writer that this miracle was wrought on *any other* dial at Jerusalem, besides that of Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. We are not to imagine that in this miracle any effect was wrought upon the motion of the earth round its axis. A miraculous refraction of the sun's rays was effected by God on a particular sun-dial, at the prayer of King Hezekiah. It was a miracle, wrought on a particular *dial*, in a particular *place*, showing that it concerned a particular *person* ; and it was not wrought on the solar *orb*, but on the solar *light*.'

Wordsworth quotes the following note from *Bishop Hall* : ' The demonstration of the miracle is reported to be *local* in the dial of Ahaz, not universal in the sensible length of the day ; whethersoever to draw the sun back with the shadow, or to *draw the shadow back without the sun*, was the proof of a Divine Omnipotence, able to *draw back the life of Hezekiah* from the night of death.'

The explanations offered either suggest a refraction of the sun's rays, an alteration of the height of the pillar, which acted as the gnomon, by an earthquake, or the effect of a partial eclipse.

The effect upon the shadow might have been produced by a

niraculous deflection of the rays which fell upon the dial, so as to hrow back the shadow to the extent required. Or there may have been a simple refraction of the rays, through the sudden interposition of a different medium. 'That such refraction takes place when rays of light pass through a denser medium, is a well-known physical act. The most striking illustration is perhaps found in the observation made, on the 27th March, 1703, by P. Romauld, prior of the cloister of Metz, that, owing to such refraction in the higher regions of the atmosphere, in connection with the appearance of a cloud, the shadow of his dial deviated an hour and a half.'

The possibility of the effect having been produced by a partial eclipse is efficiently given in a note of the *Speaker's Commentary*, following an article by Bosanquet, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*. 'Recently it has been urged with a good deal of force that the true cause of the phenomenon was a solar eclipse, in which the moon obscured the entire upper limb of the sun; and it has been clearly shown that if such an occurrence took place a little before mid-day, it would have had the effect described as having taken place—i.e., during the obscuration of the sun's upper limb shadows would be sensibly lengthened, and that of the obelisk would descend the stairs; as the obscuration passed off the reverse would take place, shadows would shorten, and that of the obelisk would once more retire up the steps. If this be the true account, the *miracle* would consist in Isaiah's supernatural foreknowledge of an event which the astronomy of the age was quite incapable of predicting, and in the Providential guidance of Hezekiah's *will*, so that he chose the "sign" which, in the natural course of things, was about to be manifested.'

An eclipse occurring, as reckoned by Thenius, on Sept. 26th, 713 B.C., may possibly be that alluded to, but unfortunately this date does not harmonize with the Assyrian chronology.

## A Pathway through Jordan.

JOSHUA iii. 16 : 'The waters which came down from above stood, and rose up in one heap, a great way off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those that went down toward the sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea, were wholly cut off; and the people passed over right against Jericho' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*This language suggests that the miracle was wrought through some ordinary mechanical agency; but it is difficult to conceive of any that would be effective in the case of a swift and flooded river.*

**Explanation.**—The carefulness and precision of this description certainly suggest that the account given was intended to be

understood as, in some sense, explaining the phenomenon. We are, however, at disadvantage, because we cannot with certainty identify the place named Adam, and so cannot be sure of the physical features of the river at this particular spot.

In attempting to realize the scene of the crossing, we should first divest our minds of some associations which we have inherited in relation to it. Until late years there was a strong tendency, among pious people, to exaggerate the wonder of the Bible miracles. They were regarded as *anti*-natural, and it was thought to glorify God if He was regarded as interfering with nature as much as possible. We now think of these incidents as *super*-natural, and think God is honoured by our recognising His working through Nature, and interfering with the 'order' as little as possible. So our fathers imagined the upper waters heaped up on the one side, and the lower waters heaped up on the other, and a narrow lane, between the walls of water, crested with foaming waves, through which the whole host of Israel marched in narrow files.

But all this is pure imagination, an attempt to realize the scene without attending to the strict descriptions given in the Scripture. We cannot wonder that such unfounded imaginations gave occasion to the sceptic and the scoffer to blaspheme. Such a host, with all their 'impedimenta,' would take days to cross a stream if only such a passage was given them ; and such an alteration in the nature and ways of water, as is involved in such a description, is quite unnecessary to a proper understanding of the narrative.

Stated briefly, what we may suppose to have occurred is this. At the part over against Jericho, there is a ford, and comparatively shallow water for a long space. By some convulsion of nature, earthquake and other agency, the river was for a time dammed, at a narrow gorge, some twenty miles up the stream. As Jordan is a swift-flowing stream, as soon as the flow was dammed back, or cut off, the waters would quickly drain away, leaving a dry, stony bed exposed for quite a long distance. Across any part of this, below the position taken up by the priests with the ark, the people, cattle, and baggage hurriedly went ; and in this way a few hours sufficed to get the whole nation on the upper terrace west of Jordan, before the swelling river overtopped its obstacle, or forced it away, and came rolling down again, filling all its banks. As the Bible account bids us look for the natural agency which God used in this most wonderful way to effect His gracious purpose, we are justified in offering the suggestion of such a solution. But it will be well to see what support can be gained for it.

'The Jordan flows at the bottom of a deep valley, which descends to the water's edge on either side in two, occasionally in three, terraces. Within the lowest of these the stream, ordinarily less than 100 feet wide in this lower part of its course, is confined.' Usually the river is easily forded, and at the time of spring-flood it may be crossed by swimming, for this the two spies must have done both going and returning.

The *Speaker's Commentary* fully recognises the natural agency employed. 'The city of Adam is not named elsewhere; and Zarthan erroneously written Zaretan in A.V., though mentioned 1 Kings, iv. 12; vii. 46, has also disappeared. It is, however, probably connected with the modern *Kurn Sartabeh* (Horn of Sartabeh), the name given to a lofty and isolated hill some seventeen miles on the river above Jericho. Here high rocks on either side contract the valley to its narrowest point, and seem almost to throw a barrier across it; and here, in all likelihood, "far away" from where Joshua and Israel were passing, were the waters held back and accumulated by the hand of God. They would need to be so but for a brief space. For as the sequel of the verse (16) points out, the waters that came down towards the sea of the plain failed; *i.e.*, they flowed rapidly off down the steeply-sloping bed of the river, and the whole channel above and before, as far as the eye could reach, lay dry before the people. The whole multitude could therefore "haste and pass over" at once.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* gathers some particulars respecting the Jordan, which help us to understand how the waters could accumulate behind a dam for some hours. 'Between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, a distance of sixty-six miles, the channel is a chasm called the Ghor, from one to twelve miles broad; in some parts fertile in the extreme, in others utterly barren; the mountains of Palestine bounding it on the west, the great eastern plateau on the other side. Within this strange bed the river descends with innumerable windings, through a lower valley which it has worn to a depth of from forty to a hundred feet below the level of the Ghor; its sides deeply fringed with a tropical jungle—known in Scripture as the "pride" or "swelling of the Jordan," and in former times the special haunt of lions. So tortuous is its course, that in the sixty-six miles between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea in a direct line, it darts at so many angles over its rough bed as to make its whole length nearly 200 miles, and in this distance it leaps and rushes over twenty-seven rapids, including in all a descent of 606 feet. The Jordan shows in its channel four broad regions, connected by two narrow ones, with a

marshy lake and valley, highest of all ; suggestive of a former chain of great lakes connected by a river, but now gradually drained off till three small sheets of water alone remain, with the broad dry beds of two others.' It is evident that such lake spaces might have been refilled with the waters that were dammed back. *Dr. Geikie* points out that 'The people could cross along a great breadth of front, which would immensely facilitate the passage.' And *Jamieson* says, 'The river was thus dried up as far as the eye could reach.' *Dean Stanley* describes thus : 'The scene presented is, of the whole bed of the river left dry from north to south, through its long windings ; the huge stones lying bare here and there, imbedded in the soft bottom ; or the shingly pebbles drifted along the course of the channel.'

A note in the new issue of the *Biblical Treasury* contains all that can be wisely said on the matter. 'It is not unreasonable that we should think of such a miraculous result being produced by the ruling and overruling of the natural agencies which God holds within His control. We may reverently inquire what natural agencies could conceivably have been employed. Evidently the cause of the stoppage of the stream was found some thirty miles (or less) above the place where Israel crossed. It is at least possible that, by an earthquake, the river bed was so obstructed that the waters were dammed back into the Lake of Galilee, which might rise for hours before the obstacle could be overcome, and the waters again flow down to the Dead Sea. God usually works His mighty works through the agency of the forces which He has created, and all natural forces are in His hands.'

### The Ascension of Elijah.

2 KINGS ii. 11 : 'And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder ; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.'

**Difficulty.**—*There is a strange blending of the natural and the supernatural in this narrative, and it is almost impossible to see the mission of the whirlwind when Elijah was carried away by horses and chariots of fire.*

**Explanation.**—Much depends on the source whence our information has come. It seems certain that Elisha is the author ; he must have been in a most excited state of mind that day, just in the mood to see visions ; and it would be quite in accordance with the ways of later editors, to embellish and adorn so striking an account as Elisha must have given.

A remarkable instance of the tendency to gather astonishing things round the stories of departures and martyrdoms is found in connection with the 'passing' of Polycarp. One of the legends woven around his story, after describing how the officers came to nail him, as usual, to the stake, but he begged them not to do so, saying that He who gave him strength to endure the fire, would enable him without nailing to stand immoveable in the hottest flames, adds this : 'Clasping his hands, which were bound behind him, he then poured out his soul in prayer ; and as the fire increased to a mighty flame, behold, a wonder ; the flames disposing themselves into the resemblance of an arch, like the sails of a ship, swelled with the wind, gently circled the body of the martyr, who stood all the while in the midst, like gold or silver purified in the furnace ; his body sending forth a delightful fragrancy, which, like frankincense or other costly spices, presented itself to our senses.'

In an endeavour to understand the actual facts that occurred in connection with the removal of Elijah, we should keep in mind that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of heaven ; corruption cannot inherit incorruption. Somehow we must all be changed ; the mortal must put on immortality, the natural body must become a spiritual body. Elijah's mortal body was not borne up into the place where God was. It was Elijah himself, not Elijah's body that went up to heaven. There must have been the removal of the mortal body, and this may have been accomplished by its being changed into a spiritual body as it went up, or the whirlwind may have carried the body away to some unknown place of earth, and the freed spirit ascended to God. Which of these represents the actual facts we are not told.

The similarity between the mode of his departure and the characteristic features of his movements while he lived should be noticed. He was always suddenly coming and going. It was no new thing for him to be carried away of the spirit.

And the natural feature of his removal especially struck the young prophets who were watching. They credited the whirlwind with his departure, and so expected to find the dropped body of the prophet when the whirlwind failed.

It may be added, that it is easy enough for a poetic nature to fashion the attendant circumstances of such a storm into the shapings of chariots and horses of fire.

The facts of which we may be sure are, that an actual whirlwind caught the prophet and swept him away into the sky ; that the atmosphere was so filled with strange light and cloud that it seemed to the watcher as if he was enwrapped with fire as he went up ; and that this

'passing' proved to be the prophet's departure from earth, for his body was never found. He was gone altogether, body and soul.

We may helpfully set together some of the explanations of the scene given by good Biblical writers of various schools.

*Kitto* says : 'As they went on, conversing of high things, suddenly a whirlwind reft Elijah from his companion, and he was borne aloft like an exhalation, in a chariot with horses of fire, or glowing like fire, to heaven. This is a strange transaction ; it seems to us, however, that it is but an isolated anticipation of that which shall happen collectively to the righteous that are alive on the earth at our Lord's second coming. Then what hinders that this rapture of the living, and change in the act of rapture—change because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God—should be exemplified in one or two instances before, in this instance of Elijah, and in the earlier instance of Enoch ? Under this view, there is no more any objection to the departed Elijah having his place in heaven, seeing that his body must have undergone all that change which was needful to fit it for abiding in that place where nothing corruptible can exist. Not discerning this, the old schoolmen were of opinion that Elijah was taken to some place—doubtless a pleasant place—prepared of old, as they supposed, for those pious spirits which awaited the coming of the Messiah, who should open paradise for them.'

*Dean Stanley* dwells strongly on the natural features of the incident. He says : 'Then came a furious storm. "And Elijah went up in the tempest into heaven." In this inextricable interweaving of fact and figure, it is enough to mark how fitly such an act closes such a life. "My father, my father," Elisha cried, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." So Elijah had stood a sure defence to his country against all the chariots and horsemen that were ever pouring in upon them from the surrounding nations. So he now seemed, when he passed away, lost in the flames of the steeds and the car that swept him from the earth, as in the fire of his own unquenchable spirit—in the fire which had thrice blazed around him in his passage through his troubled earthly career.'

*The Speaker's Commentary* says of the 'chariot of fire and horses of fire,' this was the appearance which now presented itself to the eyes of Elisha. There is no mention of a whirlwind, but only of a storm ; and the word translated 'heaven' is properly the visible firmament or sky. No honest exegesis can explain this passage in any other sense than as teaching the translation of Elijah, who was taken from the earth, like Enoch, without dying.

*Dr. A. Barry* says : 'Elijah went up in the storm heavenward, or,

perhaps, *into the air*. *Se'arah*, properly, *storm blast*; and so storm, thunderstorm. The Hebrew mind recognised the presence and working of Jehovah in the terrific phenomena of nature; the thunder-cloud or storm-wind was His chariot, the thunder His voice, the lightning His arrow. We must therefore be cautious of taking the words before us in too literal a sense. The essential meaning of the passage is this, that God suddenly took Elijah to Himself, amid a grand display of His power in and through the forces of nature. The popular conception, which we see embodied in such pictures as William Blake's *Translation of Elijah*, that the prophet ascended to heaven in a fiery car drawn by horses of fire, is plainly read into, rather than gathered from, the sacred text.'

Jamieson, in the *Critical Commentary*, understands the chariots and horses of fire to be 'some bright effulgence, which, in the eyes of the spectators, resembled those objects. There was a tempest or storm, wind accompanied with vivid flashes of fire.'

Dr. H. Allon, in *Bible Educator*, says: 'Objections have been made to this part of the narrative as being an inextricable interweaving of fact and figure. No doubt both are here, and both are to be recognised. The essential fact is that Elijah was translated without dying. Not only does the credibility of the history demand this, but the entire Biblical conception requires it also. No doubt, the manner of his translation is figuratively represented; all that the description necessarily means is, that he was caught away as in a fiery storm-cloud—poetically, God's "chariot and horses of fire;" "as a fire" Elijah "brake forth;" in a fiery storm-cloud he was taken away; the prophet of fire to the end.'

## Moses smiting the Rock.

NUMBERS xx. 11: 'And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle' (*Rev. Ver.*: see also Exodus xvii. 6).

**Difficulty.**—*No known natural agency will account for the result following upon this smiting of the rock. No incident in the life of Moses seems so strictly miraculous, so directly a Divine intervention, distinct from and beyond human experience, as this is.*

**Explanation.**—All that can be said is, that water filters through the crevices of the rocks, and is stored in basins in the mountains, so that if properly pierced an abundant supply of water can often be secured. No doubt, under Divine direction, Moses struck the rock, on both occasions, at spots where there were such secret stores of

water. But this in no way explains the connection between the smiting of the rock with a simple rod or staff, and the gushing forth of the water.

We must, however, be careful not to make the Scriptures say more than they really do. It is very easy to assume that Moses struck the rock, and *just at the place where he struck it* the water gushed forth. But a little consideration will show that this is certainly not stated, nor is it essential to the understanding of the narrative. The water stored in the recesses of the hill forced its way out in response to the smite of Moses and the controlling power of God, but it forced its way through the ordinary rock fissures, and became a flowing stream, from which the people could take supplies.

Nothing can remove the miraculous element from this case. Otherwise than man has any experience, God made the waters act in response to an appointed sign. The most careful and reverent limitation of the miraculous features still leaves us face to face with a direct Divine intervention—God working in other than His ordinary ways.

An extraordinary passage from *Fraas*, the geologist, is interesting, but must be wisely criticised: 'A sharp eye sees at the foot of Horeb, at a moderate height above the valley, on the smooth bare wall of rock, a number of green spots, some higher than others.' Climbing to one, *Fraas* found 'a granite wall rose perpendicularly from the débris below. A fig-tree at its foot is first seen, but as one approaches, shrubs and verdure show themselves, quickened by a small basin of water fed from a spring close at hand. This runs from the smooth face of the rock, about breast high, with the fulness of a good sized well-pipe. But, on looking more closely, the opening through which it burst out proved to be artificial. No traces can be seen of water elsewhere in the mountain wall, to betray the presence of a spring thus previously hidden behind the granite. On the whole face of the rock, in its height of forty feet, only crystals of felspar glitter, showing no indications of water behind. The spring has been struck out of the rock by a human hand; a circumstance which reminds a geologist acquainted with the Bible, of Moses, the great student of the hills and of men, who struck a rock on Horeb, and the water flowed from it.'

## Unexpected Water in Wady el Ahsa.

2 KINGS iii. 20: 'And it came to pass in the morning, about the time of offering the oblations, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.'

**Question.**—*If the Israelites took up the idea that a miracle was wrought for them, are we not at liberty to recognise the ordinary and natural agencies through which the water was provided?*

**Answer.**—This is a case in which, almost universally, the 'Providential' is recognised rather than the miraculous. *Josephus* explains that a storm had burst on the hills at a distance of three days' march. *Kiel* says: 'Far from the Israelitish camp, in the Eastern mountains of Edom, a great fall of rain—a kind of cloud-burst—took place, by which the wady was at once filled, without their either seeing the wind or the rains. The Divine interposition was seen by introducing the laws of nature to the determined end in the pre-determined way.' Ball, in *Ellicott's Commentary* says: 'It would seem that a sudden storm of rain had fallen on the mountains of Seir, at some distance from the camp; and the water found its natural outlet in the dry wady. *Reuss* thinks this explanation "superfluous," in the face of the "author's intention to describe a miracle;" but there are different kinds of miracle, and, in the present instance, the miraculous element is visible in the prophet's prediction of the coming help, and in the coincidence of the natural phenomena with the needs of the Israelites.'

As the incident is a somewhat unfamiliar one, it may be well to give *Dr. C. Geikie's* vivid sketch, which follows the line of suggestions given by *Kitto*: 'The united armies advanced towards Moab, by the southern route, to meet the contingent from Edom, and to pass along the edge of its territory round the south end of the Dead Sea. Seven days of painful and slow stages had brought them apparently to the Wady el Ahsa, the brook Zered of the wilderness life, marking the boundary between Edom and Moab. Usually retaining some water even in the heat of summer, it was now dry, and the army and its cattle were alike suffering from thirst. Meanwhile, Mesha had gathered all the strength of Moab, from the youngest able to bear the sword-girdle, and was close at hand. In this extremity the confederates were saved by the prophetic counsels of Elisha, who had accompanied Joram of Samaria, and was consulted by Jehoshaphat. By his directions a number of pits were dug in the bottom of the wady, where they found themselves, to catch and retain the water which he told them would presently rush down

from the highlands of Moab; though they should see neither wind nor rain, the storm breaking at too great a distance. Nor were they disappointed, for through the night the prediction was fulfilled.

‘When the sun rose suddenly, as it does in the East, with hardly any twilight, its level beams, red with the morning mists, revealed no enemy (to the Moabites), but shone with a blood-red glare on the line of pools in the wady, dug on the preceding evening. No water having existed there before, the appearance was inexplicable, except on the supposition that the confederates had quarrelled, and had destroyed each other.’ In great confusion the Moabites rushed to sack the Israelite camp, and found a vigorous enemy. They were defeated, and their country overrun and ruined.

### Balaam’s Ass.

NUMBERS xxii. 28: ‘And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?’

**Difficulty.**—*Actual speech must depend on the possession of appropriate organs of speech; but the ass is not provided with any such. How, then, are we to understand this conversation between Balaam and the animal?*

**Explanation.**—No one imagines that the organs of the animal produced miraculously an articulate sound. There was no occasion for such a miracle. All the necessities of the case are met by understanding that Balaam heard a sound which appeared to him to come from the animal. Two things in the narrative arrest attention: (1) Balaam expresses no sort of surprise at the speaking of the ass. (2) His two servants who were attending on him, and the messengers of Balak, who were accompanying him, are not reported to have shown any concern at the crushing of Balaam’s foot, at the falling of the ass and consequent peril of their master, or at the extraordinary circumstance of an ass holding a conversation.

In order to understand the *scene*, it is above all things important that we should understand the *man* who was principally concerned in it. If such a narrative were given as having actually occurred to some ordinary man, we should treat as strictly historical, however perplexing its details might seem to be. But the Bible story is an evident blending of history and mystery, and it stands in relation to quite an extraordinary man. Whatever view we take of Balaam—whether we regard him as a true or a false prophet—this at least is

quite plain, he was a man keenly sensitive to unseen influences, subject to trances, visions, secret communications with what we may call the 'other,' the 'spiritual' world. And at this time it is quite certain that he was in a strangely elevated and excited frame of mind, quickly sensitive to subtle spiritual influences.

It is probably true that, usually, his peculiar gifts and conditions of mind were made to serve his own interests and to uphold idolatrous systems ; but the true God was pleased to make direct communications with him through the very peculiarities of his nature and gifts. This sorcerer, diviner, necromancer, found the true God actually dealing with him in the line of his divining and auguring.

Keeping this in mind, we may find the best explanation of the difficulties of this narrative, by assuming that the incidents, and the voices, and the sights were quite real to Balaam, but were real only to him ; he saw them and heard them, but nobody else did ; and they did not, as we are pleased to call it, actually *occur*. They were a prophet's vision, and most real to him. Through them the Divine communication was made to him.

So purely incidental and illustrative a reference to Balaam as is found in 2 Peter ii. 16 cannot, of course, be used as any proof of the literal and historical character of the ass's speaking. However the narrative is treated, whether as descriptive or as part of a vision, it is equally true that the ass rebuked the prophet.

*Kitto*, preferring a literal interpretation, nevertheless makes a curious distinction. If the ass could miraculously speak, it must have been made miraculously to understand ; but *Kitto* hesitates to accept this. He says : 'We do not suppose that the ass thought or reasoned, though there is perhaps nothing beyond the sense or comprehension of an ass in the words which were uttered ; nor that the animal had any intention or volition in the utterance of these words. Words appropriate to the rebuking of the prophet were made to flow from the mouth of the ass, without any intention or consciousness on the part of the poor beast.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* gives an explanation which endeavours to preserve somewhat of the historical character of the narrative : 'The account of this occurrence can hardly have come from anyone else than Balaam himself . . . . That which is here recorded was apparently perceived by him alone among human witnesses . . . . The cries of the ass would seem to have been significant to Balaam's mind only. God may have brought it about that sounds uttered by the creature after its kind became to the prophet's intelligence as though it addressed him in rational speech. Indeed, to an augur, priding him-

self on his skill in interpreting the cries and movements of animals, no more startling warning could be given than one so real as this, yet conveyed through the medium of his own art ; and to a seer pretending to superhuman wisdom no more humiliating rebuke can be imagined than to teach him by the mouth of his own ass.

‘On the other hand, the opinion that the ass actually uttered with the mouth articulate words of human speech, or even that the utterance of the ass was so formed in the air as to fall with the accents of a man’s voice on Balaam’s ears, seems irreconcilable with Balaam’s behaviour. Balaam was indeed labouring under derangement, induced by his indulgence of avarice and ambition, and this, too, aggravated at the moment by furious anger ; yet it seems scarcely conceivable that he could actually have heard human speech from the mouth of his own ass, and even go on, as narrated in verses 29 and 30, to hold a dialogue with her, and show no signs of dismay and astonishment.’

What may be called the purely subjective explanation is best given by Archdeacon Farrar, in the *Expositor*, May, 1875 : ‘Now I hardly hesitate to say that the entire circumstances and context of the narrative show that the Semitic writer neither did attach, nor could have attached, any importance to what may be called the outward machinery of his story, and that he is intent, not on describing a marvel, but on teaching a lesson. And if so—if, writing in the ordinary and perfectly familiar Semitic style, which as much as possible throws every image into the concrete, and every lesson into allegory or narration ; if, accustomed by his Semitic habits of thought to see and recognise but little distinction between the Providential and the miraculous ; if, being perfectly familiar with the talking trees and animals which have always entered into Oriental parables—he wished to convey the story of an awakening conscience—the incidents which reveal to an erring soul that its ways are not pleasing to the Lord—the omen which should bring home to it the awful conviction that even the unintelligent creation around it seems more conscious of, more sensitive to, God’s presence and to the majesty of God’s offended law than itself—then I maintain that it would have been impossible for him in a manner more startling from the very simplicity—to show how it came home to Balaam’s heart that there was an awful meaning in what occurred, how conscience re-asserted its majesty, how he became aware that an angel of opposing mercy stood right in his path, to warn, to punish, haply even to save him ere it was too late. A spirit is before him. He can distinguish the very waving of his apparel ; he can no longer mistake the flash of his

sword for the hot sunshine that streams through the leaves of the vines. His eyes are opened with that great glare of unnatural illumination which so often follows the commission of a great act of sin. His soul is frozen and stunned as it realizes the dread of an avenging presence. . . . From the earliest days of belief there is abundant evidence that many great and holy minds have seen in this portion of the story a vision or a philosopheme. But to say that the ass spoke to Balaam only *in a vision* is, of course, the same thing as saying that it did not *actually* speak at all. It is to give to the story a purely subjective turn.'

The following remarks by the Rev. J. B. Heard, M.A. (in *Bib. Educator*), are as satisfactory and as suggestive as anything we have met with on this subject: 'The most striking instance of the action of the Divine Spirit, not only elevating the human spirit, but actually guiding it and carrying it whither it would not, is the case of Balaam. Balaam not only utters words beyond his consciousness, as all the holy men of old did; but this unholy man, probably as a punishment for his taking the wages of iniquity, is made to utter words against his will—he is made to bless those whom he was bribed to curse, and to curse those whom he wanted to bless. The miracle of the dumb ass speaking with man's voice is here a sign of what the Divine Spirit can do when the human spirit, like an untuned pipe, was about to give an uncertain sound. The dumb ass rebuked the madness of the prophet. There was the deepest irony in this sign from heaven. The unmelodious bray of the ass was replaced by the utterance of articulate sounds, or an impression equivalent to it, produced on the prophet's mind, teaching him, as a last warning on his way to oppose God's will, that the human pneuma is only the pipe of the Divine Pneuma, and that so mighty and powerful is that wind of God that it can breathe through the most reluctant instruments. Balaam's case is a solemn lesson as to the dependence of man for inspiration from on high.'

The Rabbinical writers have given a very extraordinary account of Balaam. They say that he was at first one of Pharaoh's counsellors, and that he was the father of Jannes and Jambres, the two noted magicians who withstood Moses when he went to Pharaoh to demand the release of Israel. They further add, that Balaam was lame, and afflicted with a squint. They affirm, too, that he was the author of that passage in the Book of Numbers which gives his personal history; and that Moses merely inserted it in the book, as he did other documents in his works, without making himself responsible for what they contained.

## Elisha's Miracles.

2 KINGS ii. 19-21, etc. : 'And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, we pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth : but the water is naught, and the land miscarrieth. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast salt therein, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters ; there shall not be from thence any more death or miscarrying' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Two features of Elisha's miracles set them in striking contrast with the miracles of Elijah, and almost tempt us to say that Elisha's miracles were not worth working. They are, the purely private and local character of most of the miracles ; and the careful way in which Elisha used material agencies in working the miracles. The means he used were 'suitable' to the production of the desired result, but not strong enough for the effect save as specially used by God, and so made efficient.*

**Explanation.**—Every man must be seen in the setting of his age ; and every man's work must be judged in the light of the sentiments and needs of the people among whom that work has to be done. Elisha was the successor of Elijah, not in the sense of continuing his precise work, but in the sense of following it up by a detailed application of its truths and principles in the private spheres of the national life. Elijah publicly asserts—and wins the national acceptance of the assertion—that Jehovah is the God of the people. Elisha has to illustrate in a hundred ways that Jehovah, as the God of the people, bears direct and interested relations to all the minutest concerns of their personal, family, social, city, and national life. If this account of the two prophets be duly pondered, it will come to be felt that the simplicity, privacy, and even what we incline to call the littleness, of Elisha's miracles can be fully justified and explained. His kind of service was as precise an adaptation to the needs of his time as Elijah's kind of service was to his. There are ages when what has been called 'religion in common life' is the supreme subject of a godly ministry. Such ages demand the teaching of *duty* rather than of *doctrine*. It was given to Elisha to show 'God in common life,' and to fix associations with the Divine Being in connection with every form of human relationship. And though not so imposing a work as Elijah's, we count Elisha's life-mission to have been at least as noble.

The other peculiarity is closely allied to this one. If Elisha is to show God in common life, he must illustrate how God sanctifies the *use of means*, and is always the power that makes means effective. In the case of Elisha there may be an unusual measure of the Divine power seen working through the means to secure unusual results, but there

by the prophet was only prominently illustrating that it is God who works, in the ordinary way, through all means, and our whole life is full of Him, 'His good hand is ever on us for good.' Elisha was a teacher, by illustrations in the life-sphere, of the truth that God is in everything.

These are reasonable solutions of the difficulties above suggested, but it may be helpful to add some explanations from other points of view.

*Dean Stanley*, in contrasting Elijah with Elisha, brings to light the elements of greatness in Elisha. 'The succession was close and immediate; but it was a succession not of likeness, but of contrast. The whole appearance of Elisha revealed the difference. The very children laughed when they saw the change. . . . His life was not spent, like his predecessor's, in unavailing struggles, but in widespread successes. . . . His deeds were not of wild terror, but of gracious, soothing, homely beneficence, bound up with the ordinary tenor of human life. At his house by Jericho the bitter spring is sweetened; for the widow of one of the prophets the oil is increased; even the workmen at the prophet's huts are not to lose the axe-head which has fallen through the thickets of the Jordan into the eddying stream; the young prophets, at their common meal, are saved from the deadly herbs which had been poured from the blanket of one of them into the caldron; and enjoyed the multiplied provision of corn. . . . His life and miracles are not Jewish, but Christian. His works stand alone in the Bible in their likeness to the acts of mediæval saints. There alone in the Sacred History the gulf between Biblical and Ecclesiastical miracles almost disappears. The exception proves the general rule; still it is but just to notice the exception. . . . Elijah, and those who are as Elijah are needed, in critical and momentous occasions, to "prepare the way for the Lord." His likeness is John the Baptist; and of those that were born of women before the times of Christendom none were "greater than they." But Elisha, and those who are like Elisha, have a humbler, and yet a wider, and therefore a holier sphere: for their works are not the works of the Baptist, but are the deeds, if not of Christ Himself, at any rate of "the least in His kingdom"—the gentle, beneficent, "holy man of God, who passeth by us continually."'

*Dr. C. Geikie* shows that 'the times had in some measure changed when Elisha came with his gentler mission. The worship of Baal was no longer in exclusive favour at court. Joram, Ahab's son and successor, at least tolerated that of Jehovah, though in association with the calf-symbols of Bethel and Dan. In after-years, under the inspiration of Jezebel, the evil genius of his house, he was to restore

Baal-worship to its old pre-eminence ; but, for the time, the work of Elijah had been accomplished, and his sternness might with advantage be laid aside. The thunders and lightnings of Horeb had done their part ; men could now listen to the "still small voice." . . . While few of the acts of Elisha are mentioned, he is noted for the number of his miracles. Was it because the power and goodness of Jehovah needed to be specially impressed on a people prone to apostatize, and tempted to do so by the rival wonders of the priests of Baal ? . . . The wonders recorded of Elisha are a testimony to his gentle and loving nature.'

*Ewald* says : 'This prophet is the subject of a number of narratives in the present Book of Kings, which not only cursorily mention him in connection with a larger circle of events, but revolve solely round the illustration of his wonderful career. Although in the last resort derived from various older and more recent sources, they constitute in every respect an unmistakable unity, and must have been recorded in a special work before they were incorporated in the present Book of Kings. They all possess a certain resemblance in so far as they only bring into prominence the recollections of Elisha's miracles. The province of religion is always the province of miracles also, because it is that of pure and strong faith in the presence and operation of heavenly forces actively as well as passively ; where, therefore, true religion makes the most powerful effects, there will be a corresponding display of miracles which will either actually take place through the activity of the believing spirit, or will be at any rate experienced by the believing heart ; while to be vividly penetrated, though only from a distance, with the might of such forces, is in itself a gain. Thus far the age of Elijah and Elisha, when the true religion was obliged to maintain itself with the utmost force against its internal enemies, was as rich in miracles as the days of Moses and Joshua or the conclusion of the period of the Judges had been ; only these miracles do not now, as in the time of Moses and Joshua, affect the whole nation, nor as in the era of the last Judges are they directed against a foreign people, but they proceed from a few individual prophets who are compelled as instruments of the ancient religion to exert all the greater power, as in the nation itself the true faith threatens to disappear. No such stories can be anything more than scattered traces of the action of a spirit in itself miraculous, and of the impression immediately produced by it ; but that there is some spirit of power in religion to the agency of which they all point is only the more certain.'

## The Budding of Aaron's Rod.

NUMBERS xvii. 8: 'And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bare ripe almonds' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Does this incident show us how miracle may be employed to give Divine testimony to an individual? Does it illustrate the use of miracle as evidence?*

**Answer.**—Illustrating what he calls the 'general economy of miracles,' Thomson remarks on the selection of rods from the almond-tree, which hastens to bud and blossom long before any other tree has begun to wake out of the repose of winter, and before it has put forth its own leaves. In this case, indeed, there was miraculous rapidity; but not only do the blossoms of the almond appear on it suddenly, but the fruit *sets at once*, and appears even while the flowers are yet on the tree—buds, blossoms, and almonds together on the same branch as on this rod of Moses.

It is evident that this trial partakes of the character of trial by lot. Declaration of the Divine will through the word of Moses did not satisfy certain ambitious folk, and questionings and murmurings arose. It was necessary, therefore, that, in some open and public way and by some manifest sign, the will of God should be made known. The miracle was, therefore, distinctly wrought as a confirmation of the authority of Moses. It was a kind of appeal from the assertion of Moses to the direct mind of God—an appeal which He was graciously pleased to respond to.

Miracles may be wrought to attest a person or to confirm a truth. This accomplished both objects; it declared Moses to be God's agent, and it confirmed the truth of that particular message which he had delivered in the matter of the priesthood.

*F. Myers, M.A.*, wisely says on the question above suggested: 'And let it be noted that the working of miracles, wherever it might be most fully admitted, did not on Biblical principles prove anything more with regard to the person so working them than that he had a general mission from God as a prophet; and also that the working of miracles was not a necessary token of the prophet's mission. Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, worked miracles, and were still but men of like passions and infirmity with others; while the great body of the Old Testament prophets wrought no miracles that we know of; nor did he who was the greatest of these in some respects, the immediate herald of the Messiah. The truth concerning this matter

probably is, that miracles are most duly thought of when they are considered as a peculiar class of facts intended to awaken men to a perception of, and attention to, God's immediate presence—as hints, excitements, suggestions, rather than as evidences. Indeed, no amount or frequency of exhibitions of physical power can of itself prove anything as to either the truth or worth of any proposition. There is no kind of logical or moral consequence in saying that one who is extraordinarily powerful must, therefore, be extraordinarily good . . . . The faith produced by miracles is rather a subjugation of the senses than an affiance of the heart—a belief after seeing, instead of trust before sight ; and were this to be most highly prized, the blessing of Christ would be reversed.'

### Hezekiah's Cure.

2 KINGS xx. 7 : 'And Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Are we to regard the plaster of figs as an efficient remedy, or as a material sign, helping belief in the Divine and miraculous healing ?*

**Answer.**—There is no intimation in the narrative that the recovery took a miraculous character. That is an inference which the reader may make, if he thinks there are sufficient grounds for it ; but it is necessary to show extreme care in distinguishing between what the Scriptures *assert*, and what men *infer* from that which is found in Scripture. The Divine inspiration does not include and guarantee men's inferences. What is most certainly declared in the record, is God's direct intervention to guide the progress of the disease, and to bless the remedial agencies employed ; but if terms are used with precision, this should be called 'Providential,' and not 'miraculous.'

At the same time there is much to be said in favour of the inference that the plaster of figs was only a visible sign of a supernatural work of healing. And the chief thing to be said is, that it was in harmony with Divine dealing thus to help faith by outward signs. We may recall to mind the requirement of Naaman, that he should bathe in Jordan ; our Lord's use of spittle for anointing the blind man's eyes ; and James's suggestion, that faith in the Lord's healing of the sick man should be shown by helping the man to make his toilet as if he was restored.

The description given of the disease from which Hezekiah suffered is not presented in sufficient detail for us to identify it with any cer-

tainty. It is called a 'boil,' and boils of a malignant character, that imperil life, are known by us as 'carbuncles,' and if these come in certain positions of the body, the patient has a terribly suffering time, and retains life only with extremest effort. The one thing that inclines us to recognise in Hezekiah's boil a malignant carbuncle is, that such developments often follow upon the lowered vitality attending times of great mental strain and anxiety. The physical effects of 'worry' often find expression in such diseased discharges; and through a time—and a prolonged time—of supreme anxiety this good king had been passing. A boil in the arm-pit, setting up severe inflammation, constitutes the well-known plague of Egypt, which was for so many centuries, and until lately, the scourge of the Levant. If such boils can be made to discharge freely, the danger of them quickly passes away; but if the discharge be unnatural, or unduly prolonged, the patient sinks under the strain or the general disturbance of his system, and a good deal depends on skill of treatment in the later stages of the disease. Those who have suffered from such eruptions know well the extreme pain and exhaustion of the time immediately preceding the suppuration of the boil, and the instant and delightful relief felt when the discharge commences.

We need not assume that so familiar a remedy as a poultice of figs had not been thought of by the king's physicians, but it would be quite in accordance with human nature in doctors, if they had used all sorts of *grand* remedies and neglected this very simple household one. And if the boil was almost ready for bursting, this poultice would do exactly what was required. We may, therefore, regard the application of it as an efficient means upon which the Divine blessing graciously rested, and Hezekiah's recovery may take rank among those healings in answer to prayer, with which we are ourselves familiar. It is not sufficiently noticed, that Hezekiah's recovery was not until *the third day* after the application of the poultice, which certainly suggests that the healing agency did its work in the ordinary and usual manner.

### Elijah's Horeb Scene.

1 KINGS xix. 11: 'And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord, and, behold, the Lord passed by.'

**Difficulty.**—*In this scene mental vision is so blended with what seems to be miracle, that it is nearly impossible to tell what is natural and what is supernatural.*

**Explanation.**—Such cases must always be judged in the light of the temperament of the person concerned, and in view of his par-

ticular mental mood at the time of the occurrence. What is narrated here is the Divine correction and revival of the faint-hearted and unduly despondent prophet. Communications were made directly to his heart, and also mediately through the influence exerted by the grand things of nature upon him. Prophetic and poetic souls are sensitive to nature-moods in ways and degrees that seem impossible to prosaic souls. They can hear messages, and translate into definite meaning sights and sounds, which are dumb to most of us. And if God would communicate with such prophetic souls, nature, in her softer or her wilder moods, may be His voice to them. A distinct purpose, to nourish the sense of awe and reverence, led to the people of Israel being brought amongst the awful primeval rocks of Sinai. It was the appropriate spot of earth for the revelation of the one living and true God; and Nature-influences harmonized with the verbal revelations. The same may be remarked of this scene of Elijah. The grand things of nature, witnessed among the everlasting hills, are not miracles, but they are the servants of God, coming and going at His bidding, and doing His work, and carrying His messages, as they come and go.

There does not seem to be any necessity for introducing the supernatural into this Horeb scene, unless it be thought supernatural that the Great Spirit should communicate directly with the human spirit. That, however, we have learned to regard as a regular method of Divine dealing. *John Howe's* view can have its reference to other modes of producing impressions of God than those found in the written Word. He says: 'Nor do I believe that God never doth immediately testify His own special love to holy souls without the intervention of some part of His eternal Word, made use of as a present instrument to that purpose, or that He always doth it in the way of methodical reasoning therefrom.'

The associations of a great storm of wind and lightning among the mountains will explain the phenomena recorded, and the gentle breathing of the air, when the storm-time had passed, is the basis of the poetical figure of the 'still small voice.' He reads the story aright who reads the impression made on Elijah, and the prophetic communications for which God thus prepared the way, ensuring in His servant an open, and receptive, and humble mood.

No one seems to have realized the scene better than *Dean Stanley*, whose description seems to so recreate the incident as to satisfy all difficulties. 'Elijah is drawn out by the warning, like that which came to Moses on the same spot, and stands on the mountain-side, expecting the signs of the Divine presence. He listened; and there

came the sound of a rushing hurricane, which burst through the mountain wall and rolled down the granite rocks in massive fragments round him. "But Jehovah was not in the wind." He stood firm on his feet, expecting it again; and under his feet the solid mountain shook, with the shock of a mighty earthquake. "But Jehovah was not in the earthquake." He looked out on the hills as they rose before him in the darkness of the night, and they flamed with flashes of fire, as in the days of Moses. "But Jehovah was not in the fire." And then, in the deep stillness of the desert air—unbroken by falling stream, or note of bird, or tramp of beast, or cry of man—came the whisper, of a voice as of a gentle breath—of a voice so small that it was almost like silence. Then he knew that the moment was come. He drew, as was his wont, his rough mantle over his head; he wrapt his face in its ample folds; he came out from the sheltering rock, and stood beneath the cave to receive the Divine communications. They blended with the vision: one cannot be understood without the other.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* seems to accept the phenomena as natural and ordinary, for he says: 'A rushing hurricane, before which Elijah sank once more into the depths of the cave, burst through the awful gorges of the mountains, tearing off huge granite fragments on every side. Then followed the crash of an earthquake, making the mighty peaks and summits rock and sway on their foundations; and after that the peals of an awful thunderstorm reverberated through the naked defiles: the incessant blaze of Eastern lightning flaming around, and revealing the heights and depths of the rocky wilderness.'

*Bonar's* description of the district round Elijah at the time, and this Divine revelation to him, will enable us to realize how profoundly nature must have influenced him. 'We saw the "great and terrible wilderness" around us . . . no green spot, no tree, no flower, no rill, no lake, but dark brown ridges, red peaks, like pyramids of solid fire. No rounded hillocks, or soft mountain curves such as one sees even in the ruggedest of home-scenes, but monstrous and misshapen cliffs, rising tier above tier, and surmounted here and there by some spire-like summits, serrated for miles into rugged grandeur, and grooved from head to foot by the winter torrents that had swept down like bursting water-spouts, tearing their naked loins, and cutting into the very veins and sinews of the fiery rock; a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death; without any order, and where the light is as darkness.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* suggestively calls this scene an 'acted parable.'

## Preservation of Clothes during the Wilderness Journey.

DEUTERONOMY viii. 4: 'Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.'

**Question.**—*Does this declare only an extraordinary, or must we understand a miraculous, preservation of clothing?*

**Answer.**—It is singular to find no mention of this matter either in Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers. Moses refers to it again in his preamble to the renewal of the covenant (chap. xxix. 5). 'And I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes are not worn old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.' When the Levites, in Neh. ix. 21, recall the Divine mercies shown to the Israelite race, they repeat the words of Moses, 'their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.' In view of the figurative character of Eastern expression, our first thought would be that this is a sort of proverb, a common saying to indicate the Divine care and keeping: and this view is well supported by further consideration and careful study.

The actual preservation of clothes and shoes from decay was not necessary to the safety or comfort of the people, as they had the materials for renewal at easy command. Wandering tribes are almost entirely dressed in homespun, the materials being provided from the wool of sheep and goat, and even camel. The skins of animals dying, sacrificed, or slaughtered for eating, provided abundance of leather. And no intimation is given us that the Israelites were debarred from bartering with the tribes around, and so procuring other articles needed for their comfort or use. We may reverently say that there does not appear to have been sufficient occasion for a miracle to *preserve* what could be so readily *renewed*.

The tendency unduly to introduce the miraculous element is seen in the fact that the Jewish commentators assert concerning this matter, that the clothes of the people grew with their growth from childhood to manhood.

Waller, in *Ellicott's Commentary*, says: 'We cannot say that anything miraculous is certainly intended, though it is not impossible. It may mean that God in His providence directed them to clothe themselves in a manner suitable to their journey and their mode of life.'

*Speaker's Commentary* says: 'These words in a passage like the present, where the speaker is not so much narrating historically as

alluding for hortatory purposes to God's care of them in the desert, may signify no more than that "God so amply provided for them all the necessities of life, that they were never obliged to wear tattered garments, nor were their feet injured for lack of shoes or sandals."'

Both in Deut. viii. 4, and xxix. 5, the words 'waxes not old upon' should be read 'fell not from off,' and simply mean that the people were never without suitable clothing.

## David's Vision of the Angel.

I CHRONICLES xxi. 16 : 'And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.'

**Question.**—*Was this a vision made to the mind of David only, or may we think there was some outward appearance which others besides David could perceive ? (See verse 20).*

**Answer.**—It is not possible to give any description of a Bible 'vision' which would be found to suit all cases that are recorded. In the very idea of a vision is involved that it should be precisely adapted to the occasion, and fitted to the mental moods, and the sphere of knowledge, of the person to whom it is given. Whether the impression was always produced on the man that he actually saw something with his bodily eyes cannot be assured. We know how it is possible for us to see things which never take any material shape. Possibly the normal idea of communication by vision was this—a man seemed to see a sight, though there was no external form, and to hear a voice, though there was no person speaking. But it must be admitted that in many cases the vision was of an external form ; there was something which the bodily senses could apprehend.

There are cases narrated, with more or less of truth, of strange appearances in the clouds, foreshadowing the doom of cities or the approach of grave calamities ; but these are usually the creations of men of great imaginative sensitiveness, and others seem to see what they can show them. David's vision of the angel of the plague belongs to this class of portents, but is connected with a precise Divine communication. There is no reason against the assumption that a great cloud-form, taking shape to a sensitive mind like an angel with a sword, and seen by others as well as David, formed the actual basis, the external reality, of an inward and spiritual revelation of the Divine will. It should, however, be carefully noted that, in this case, the prophet Gad was the medium of Divine communications, and the angel-form did but serve to arouse due attention and concern.

On verse 20, *Ellicott's Commentary* says: 'There can be little doubt that this is corrupt, and that the text of Samuel is right. "And Araunah looked up, and saw the king and his servants passing by him."' On this showing we may consider that the angel-vision was one which was given to David alone. To understand the incidents the account given in 2 Samuel xxiv. should be compared. From it we learn that the sight of the angel of judgment wakened David to a sense of sin, and drove him to confession and prayer. Then Gad brought to him the Divine answer, and spoke it to him in human words. Some writers have suggested that the more minute and wonderful details given in Chronicles are 'derived from the imagination of the writer, who gratified his love of the marvellous by thus expanding the simpler words of his predecessor.'

*Dean Stanley*, without affirming that the instances were strictly similar, says: 'Above this spot (the threshing-floor of Araunah) is said to have appeared an awful vision, such as is described in the later days of Jerusalem, or in the pestilence of Rome, under Gregory the Great, or in our own plague of London, of a celestial messenger stretching out a drawn sword between earth and sky over the devoted city.'

'The Bible idea of an angel seems to be that of an agent, other than man, employed to carry out the Divine purposes in the sphere of creation, and especially in this our world. If we accept this comprehensive conception of an angel, we shall understand how there may be angels of affliction, angels of death, and even angels of temptation, all engaged directly in the Divine service. Destruction by pestilence is on several occasions attributed to the ministry of an angel, e.g., destruction of the first-born in Egypt, and of Sennacherib's army. This is still a familiar poetic figure. Sometimes unseen things have been graciously set within the sphere of the senses, in order to help men to feel the reality of the unseen. Angels are unseen beings; the Divine workings are largely secret and unseen; but it pleases God to set his people sometimes "within the veil"; or, we may say, "behind the scenes"; or down below among the machinery, so that they may gain for themselves, and give to others, fitting impressions of the reality of the Divine working.'—*Pulpit Commentary*.

## Life from touching the Bones of Elisha.

2 KINGS xiii. 21 : ' And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a hand ; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha : and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet ' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Difficulty.**—*There does not appear to be any sufficient reason for the working of this miracle ; and no one was so connected with it as to indicate how it made witness for God.*

**Explanation.**—This narrative is certainly one of the most perplexing in the Old Testament, and is only matched by the equally astonishing statement of the New Testament, that at our Lord's death, ' the graves were opened ; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many ' (Matt. xxvii. 52, 53).

The first suggestion that comes to mind is that such a passage must surely be a later addition to the narrative, and must belong to a time when there was a disposition to multiply wonders. *Dean Stanley* very significantly says : ' Alone of all the graves of the saints of the Old Testament, there were wonders wrought at it which seemed to continue after death the grace of his long and gentle life. It was *believed* that by the mere touch of his bones a dead corpse was re-animated.' And *Dr. S. G. Green* evidently feels the difficulty of this case, for, after enumerating the miracles of Elisha, he says : ' *May we* add the miracle wrought even by his bones in the sepulchre, on touching which a dead man revived and stood upon his feet ?'

But we can find no support for the idea that this narrative is a later addition to the text. It must be accepted as a part of the history, and probably nothing can be said about it more satisfactory than that which may be found in an ' Additional Note ' of the *Speaker's Commentary*. ' The miracle of Elisha's after his death is more surprising than any of those which he performed during his life-time. The Jews regarded it as his highest glory ; and hence the son of Sirach concludes his eulogy of Elisha with a double reference to it : " No word could overcome him, and after his death his body prophesied. He did wonders in his life, and at his death were his works marvellous " (Eccles. xlviii. 13, 14). No exact parallel to the miracle offers itself to us in the rest of Scripture. Still, it may be said to belong to a class of Scripture miracles, cases, *i.e.*, where the miracle was not wrought through the agency of a living miracle-worker, but by a

material object in which, by God's will, "virtue" for the time resided. The most familiar example of this class is the staunching of the issue of blood by the touch of the hem of Christ's garment; but the cures wrought by "handkerchiefs and aprons" brought to the sick from the body of St. Paul (Acts xix. 12) are still more nearly parallel. Another, not exactly similar, but still connected instance, is that of St. Peter's shadow, which seems to have had a healing efficacy (see Acts v. 15). Miracles of this kind appear to be peculiarly offensive to our modern thought, but it is difficult to say why. As Dean Alford well observes: "All miraculous working is an exertion of the direct power of the All-powerful; a suspension *by Him* of His ordinary laws; and whether He will use *any* instrument in doing this, or *what* instrument, must depend altogether on His own purpose in the miracle—the effect to be produced *on* the recipients, beholders, or hearers. Without His special selection and enabling *all instruments were vain*—with these, *all are capable*." In the present instance, no doubt, the primary effect was greatly to increase the reverence of the Israelites for the memory of Elisha, to lend force to his teaching, and especially to add weight to his unfulfilled prophecies, as to that concerning the coming triumphs of Israel over Syria. In the extreme state of depression, to which the Israelites were now reduced, a very signal miracle may have been needed to encourage and reassure them.'

For ourselves we confess that no real relief of the difficulties of this incident can be obtained; and we are content to leave it among the things that must remain 'hard to be understood.'

### Fiery Serpents.

NUMBERS xxi. 6: 'And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died.'

**Question.**—*Does the assertion that 'the Lord sent' these serpents involve that He sent them in a miraculous way?*

**Answer.**—This is one of the cases in which we may trace the distinction between the Providential and the miraculous. The serpents are characteristic of the district; their special number, their activity, and the inflammatory character of their bite at this time, all indicate a controlling Providence; but there is nothing that can properly be called supernatural in the incidents. The Providential keeps strictly in the line of natural agencies, but may vary their action. The miraculous introduces other agencies than belong to ordinary human experience.

The expression 'the Lord sent' is the pious sentiment and expression of the Jew, who traced the direct working of God in everything

that happened. We may call it the detailed and practical expression of the idea of the *theocracy*—the direct rule, control, action of God in all the concerns of the people. When we should say of a thing, '*it happened*,' the Israelite would say, 'God did so and so,' or 'God sent so and so.' If we firmly hold that the Providential is the Divine, we may call the visitation of the fiery serpents Providential. It was Divine chastisement and correction by the control of Providential arrangements. An ordinary annoyance and peril was made to become a public calamity.

The description 'fiery' may refer to the appearance of the snake, but it would be more simple to treat it as suggesting the inflammation caused by its bite. Quite a number of snakes have been described with a view to identification, but the one thing to which inquiry should be limited is, what are the serpents now found in that portion of country through which the Israelites were travelling at this time? To this question *Dr. C. Geikie* gives careful attention, and upon it he has collected valuable information. He says: 'The region itself provided a terrible punishment for such disloyalty and rebellion. Venomous serpents abounded in it, and spread terror and death. A strange confusion of texts has led to the common idea that they were "flying serpents" that thus assailed Israel. But there is not a word in Numbers or Deuteronomy of their being so (Deut. viii. 15). It is Isaiah who speaks of "flying serpents," but without any reference to the incidents of the desert (Isai. xiv. 29; xxx. 6). It is highly interesting to find that in the very neighbourhood in which Israel was then encamped, travellers mention the existence of serpents in great numbers. Thus, Captain Frazer tells us that "All the Arabs say there are *flying serpents* here, three feet long, very venomous, their bite deadly; they have no wings, but *make great springs*." Mr. Churton, when south-west of the Dead Sea, fell in with a large *red-coloured* serpent, which came out of a hollow tree, and was declared by the Arabs to be poisonous. *Burckhardt* writes: "The sand showed everywhere tracks of these reptiles. My guide told me they were very numerous in these parts, and that the fishermen were in such dread of them, that they put out their fire each night before going to sleep, lest it should attract them." In a similar strain *Schubert* tells us that "A large and very mottled snake was brought us, marked with fiery red spots and stripes. From its teeth, it evidently belonged to one of the most poisonous kinds. The Bedouins say that these creatures, of which they are in terror, are very numerous in this locality."

Alexander, in crossing Gedrosia, lost many men through the serpents which sprang upon them from the sand and brushwood.

## Inexhaustible Meal and Oil.

1 KINGS xvii. 14 : . For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*To what class of miracles does this belong; and can any explanation be given of so remarkable a provision being made for so small a family of strangers?*

**Answer.**—Somewhat similar miracles are found in Elisha's multiplying the loaves and corn and oil (2 Kings iv. 6, 42-44), and our Lord's feeding of the thousands. All the cases are outside of, and beyond, ordinary human experience, and bear an evident supernatural character.

As an illustration, and a teaching of the people by illustration, this miracle was all the more striking and effective, in that it was wrought for a poor and despised widow, and she a stranger to the claims and privileges of Israel. It was a manifestation of the grace and providing of God, which was all the more impressive because of the dark background on which it was set. And the woman's faith in God, shown in acts of trustful obedience, puts to shame the unbelief of Israel, whose forsaking of Jehovah had brought on the terrible judgment of the famine.

Very few Biblical writers attempt to deal with the difficulties of this incident. They usually satisfy themselves with pointing out its moral or religious suggestions. *Ellicott's Commentary* contains the following good note: 'The miracle is doubly remarkable. First, in this instance, as in the similar miracles of Elisha, and of our Lord Himself, we see that God's higher laws of miracle, like the ordinary laws of His Providence, admit within their scope the supply of what we should consider as homely and trivial needs—in this respect, perhaps, contradicting what our expectation would have suggested. Next, that it is a miracle of multiplication, which is virtual creation—not necessarily out of nothing—doing rapidly and directly what, under ordinary laws, has to be done slowly and by indirect process.

The *Speaker's Commentary* recognises and deals with objections from the naturalistic point of view: 'This is the first recorded miracle of its kind—a supernatural and inexplicable multiplication of food. This class of miracles offers peculiar difficulties to modern sceptics, who ask whether the senses and appetite were cheated, or whether new matter was created, or whether, finally, there was a transformation of previously existing matter into meal, oil, fish, and bread. The sacred record does not enable us to answer these

inquiries positively; but we may observe that, if the last of the three explanations above suggested be the true one, the marvel of the thing would not be much greater than that astonishing natural chemistry by which, in the growth of plants, particles of water, air, and earth are transmuted into fruits and grains of corn, and so fitted to be human food. There would be a difference in the agency employed, and in the time occupied in the transmutation, but the thing done would be almost the same.'

It has been remarked that 'the supernatural character of the history of Elijah, in which miraculous incidents are crowded in a very remarkable way, has naturally directed upon it the fiercest hostility of rationalistic critics. *Ewald*, and after him *Bunsen*, have summarily pronounced the narrative unhistorical. *Bunsen's* theory is that the narrative is a traditional myth, a popular epic poem, like the *Iliad*; the image of Elijah, like that of Hercules, being that of a fabulous hero, a "wonderful creative representation," as *Ewald* expresses it, "of the sublimest prophetic truths." The primary question of the validity of the miraculous element in Old Testament history must, however, be determined upon broader and more general grounds, than are presented by any one particular set of incidents.

## The Natural Agencies in the Miracle of dividing the Sea.

EXODUS xiv. 21: 'And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.'

**Difficulty.**—*This assertion, that the waters were removed by the agency of the east wind, appears to relieve the narrative of its miraculous character.*

**Explanation.**—If we use terms with precision, it may be said that the events here narrated were 'Providential,' and not strictly 'miraculous.' Nothing is said that may not be accounted for by the action of ordinary, known, and natural forces; but there are combinations, degrees, and fittings of times, which distinctly and impressively convince of the direct intervention of God, the controlling of Divine Providence. As the natural agencies which God was pleased to use for the outworking of His purpose are precisely stated, it is proper for us to endeavour to understand what actually occurred.

Before attempting an explanation of the wonderful crossing, it may be well to confirm the reasonableness of our undertaking by

quoting the following words of *Canon Rawlinson*: 'Whether the whole effect was purely natural, or whether (as in so many other cases) God used the force of nature so far as it could go, and further supernaturally increased its force, we are not told, and may form what opinion we please.' And also the language of *Canon Cook*: 'It is distinctly stated that the agency by which the object was effected was natural. It is clear that Moses takes for granted that a strong east wind blowing through the night, under given circumstances, would make the passage quite possible. It would seem to be scarcely practicable, when the wind blows from other quarters.'

In a previous paragraph, we have taken the view that a wide stretch of sand reached from Suez to the Bitter Lakes; that this was at one time but lightly covered with the sea at low tide, and across it one or more fords were arranged. The stretch of sand, at least a mile or two wide, and from one to six miles across, was the wide road providentially prepared for the crossing of the Israelites. We have, therefore, to inquire what help our knowledge of such tide-washed belts of sand will give us towards the understanding of the scene.

Bays, or sandy estuaries, such as that known as Morecambe Bay, afford valuable suggestions. In the inland part of that bay, the tide sometimes runs right out, leaving a great reach of sand—seamed with channels—which quickly hardens, so that persons, and even carts and horses, readily cross from one side to the other, a distance of some miles. It is necessary, however, to know the state both of the wind and the tide, for the wind may retard the tide or may hurry its return; and it has been known to come back so swiftly along the channels, that the fleetest horse, caught in the middle of the bay, could not hope to escape. We have imagined the tide held back for some time by an opposing wind, and the host of Israel well-nigh covering this great stretch of sand, hurrying across while the pathway kept safe, and felt that Morecambe Bay must well represent the district north of Suez.

A fact may be added, which has been observed in connection with the Goodwin Sands, off Ramsgate. When the tide recedes far back, the treacherous sands become so hard that games of cricket are played upon them; but as soon as the tide turns, they change again into quicksands, which would readily engulf Pharaoh and all his cavalry.

We have then, in the description of the district above Suez, and in our knowledge of the effects of wind on sands and tides, the materials for a very reasonable explanation of the deliverance of Israel by a passage through the sea. It is true that the agency of the wind

alone is mentioned, but the ordinary effect of the tides is assumed ; and it is interesting to note that an Egyptian tradition distinctly states, 'Moses waited for the ebb tide in order to lead the Israelites across.' It may be further remarked, that the Hebrews gave names only to the four winds from the four cardinal points, so that north-east and south-east, the winds employed in this case, are included under the general term east. It was a north-east wind which kept back the tide, holding it from its usual return flow at its appointed time, and prolonging the hours for the crossing ; it was a sudden change of wind to the south-east, which brought the gathered waters swiftly and overwhelmingly down upon the hosts of Pharaoh.

Due account must be taken of the position of the sand banks ; of the waters of the Bitter Lakes preventing attack from the north ; of the receding tide ; of the effect of the wind in hardening the surface of the sand ; of the protection on the south afforded by the main waters of the sea ; of the effect on the sand of the trampling of so many feet ; of the difficulties of crossing in the face of the strong wind ; and of the suddenness with which the waves would return, when the restraining wind was removed. All these belong to the natural agencies employed to work out the Divine purposes, and they are adequate to produce the results narrated, without assuming anything of a supernatural character.

But while so much may be admitted, there are some parts of the narrative which cannot be explained by any suggestions in the line of human experiences, and must be traced to immediate Divine intervention and arrangement of an unusual and miraculous character. The fitting of events to times ; the cloud, bright towards Israel, and dark towards the Egyptians ; the connection of natural events with Divine command, especially strike us as indications of the immediate working of God ; though the general impression of the whole story is certainly an impression of God's working *within*, rather than *from beyond*, the Nature-sphere. The deliverance of Israel was a remarkable instance of 'special providence.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* gives a description of the scene, which we can generally approve, though we should otherwise explain some of the details. He says : 'Ebb and flood tide, in the narrow northern ford especially, are affected greatly by the wind prevailing at any given time. When it blows strongly from the north-east, which it often does, the waters are driven south, into the bay, on the west shore, leaving four islets stretching in a line north from Suez, and separated from the firm land, and from each other, by narrow but deep channels. Near these is the upper ford, which can be passed on

foot at the lowest ebb, by those well acquainted with the ground. The other, to the south, bends northward towards this one, but its length makes it less used. The waters appear to have reached a little further east and north at the time of the Exodus than they do at present ; but either of these lines of sand bank may have been used, under the guidance and miraculous aid of God. The night set in dark and stormy, with a violent north-east gale which blew all night, and drove the waters before it, at ebb tide, into the south-west bay, till the sandy ridge of the ford was laid bare : the shore waters thus becoming a wall, or protection, to the Hebrews on the right, and those of the open sea on the left hand. The storm prolonging the ebb, delayed the flow of the tide, and thus before morning, the whole of the Hebrews—here, going round pools, there, kept back by the tempest, and by the slow progress of the cattle—were able to reach the east shore ; after a long and slow march, aggravated by the terrors of the night.'

We prefer, however, the less detailed, but more suggestive, note of *Canon Rawlinson*. 'By a "strong east wind" we are at liberty to understand one blowing from any point between north-east and south east. If we imagine the Bitter Lakes joined to the Red Sea by a narrow and shallow channel, and a south-east wind blowing strongly up this channel we can easily conceive that the water in the Bitter Lakes might be driven northwards, and held there, while the natural action of the ebb tide withdrew the Red Sea water to the southward. A portion of the channel might in this way have been left dry, and have so continued until the wind changed and the tide began to flow.'

*Note on the figure in verse. 22.*—The notion that is suggested by the pictures in our older Bibles, of heaped-up and foaming waters making walls to a narrow passage, could only have been conceived by persons who failed to understand the poetical and figurative character of Bible language. Anything that acts as a protection is in Scripture called 'a wall.' (Comp. 1 Sam. xxv. 16 ; Prov. xviii. 11 ; Isa. xxvi. 1 ; Jer. i. 18 ; Nahum iii. 8.) All that we need understand is the defence from flank attacks by the Egyptians which was afforded by the fact that deep waters were both on the right and on the left of their divinely made path. The Egyptians were compelled to come on behind them, and if they had attacked, the soldiers of Israel could have kept them at bay until the whole host was safely across. *Kalisch's* idea that on this occasion the 'water gave up its nature, formed with its waves a strong wall, and instead of streaming like a fluid, congealed into a hard substance,' has been properly called an 'instance of turning poetry into prose, and enslaving one's self to a narrow literalism.'

## Balaam's Trance.

NUMBERS xxiv. 4 : 'He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open.'

**Question.**—*Is it possible for us to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural in this account?*

**Answer.**—Probably that is a hopeless task, because we do not know the character or the extent of the gifts with which Balaam was endowed. We cannot hesitate in saying that there are natural features, and it is quite certain that there were also Divine usings and over-rulings; but just where the natural ends and the supernatural begins, it is not possible to decide.

A trance must be classed among purely natural things. There seems to be a marked peculiarity in this trance. Usually the eyes are shut; if open, they do not see things actually existing around them. In this case the eyes were open, and it is suggested that they were actually fixed on the sight of the tents of Israel. In the trance which takes an ecstatic form, the person is lost to all external impressions, but rapt and absorbed in some object of the imagination. 'Nervous and susceptible persons are apt to be thrown into these trances under the influence of what is called mesmerism. There is, for the most part, a high degree of mental excitement. The patient utters the most enthusiastic and fervid expressions, or the most earnest warnings. The character of the whole frame is that of intense contemplative excitement. He believes that he has seen wonderful visions and heard singular revelations.'

'Whatever explanation may be given of it, it is true of many, if not of most, of those who have left the stamp of their own character on the religious history of mankind, that they have been liable to pass at times into this abnormal state. The union of intense feeling, strong volition, long-continued thought (the conditions of all wide and lasting influence), aided in many cases by the withdrawal from the lower life of the support which is needed to maintain a healthy equilibrium, appears to have been more than the "earthly vessel" will bear. The words which speak of "an ecstasy of adoration" are often literally true. The many visions, the journey through the heavens, the so-called epilepsy of Mahomet, were phenomena of this nature. Of the three great mediæval teachers, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Joannes Scotus, it is recorded that they would fall into the ecstatic state, remain motionless, seem as if dead, sometimes for a whole day, and then, returning to consciousness, speak as if they had drunk deep of Divine mysteries.'

The words 'into a trance' have no equivalents in the Hebrew, but the word 'falling' clearly involves passing into an unusual mental state. It suggests that Balaam's mind and mouth were taken captive by God, and used for His purpose. The *Speaker's Commentary* thinks 'the word "falling" indicates the force of the Divine inspiration overpowering the seer, as Saul was overpowered, and stripped of his clothes before Samuel, and "fell," "lay down naked all that day and all that night." The faithful prophets of the Lord do not appear to have been subject to these violent illapses. In Balaam and in Saul the word of God could only prevail by first subduing the alien will, and overpowering the bodily energies which the will ordinarily directs.'

What we are to understand is that Balaam possessed something which answered to the prophetic gift. This was usually under the control of his own will; but on this occasion his own will was put aside, and he was made the subject of a special Divine inspiration. In this case we have no mere ecstasy of trance, but a genuine Divine commission and impulse.

### Restoring the Dead Child.

1 KINGS xvii. 21: 'And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again.'

**Difficulty.**—*There does not appear to have been any need for this personal exertion of the prophet, if he depended on Divine reviving in answer to prayer.*

**Explanation.**—We have allowed ourselves to cherish the sentiment that a miracle is a Divine intervention distinct from, and independent of, all human and natural means and instrumentalities, whereas the large proportion of the Scripture miracles are simply an unusual fulness and promptness of Divine benediction resting on human means and instrumentalities. They are God working, in an astonishing way, within the system of things—of causes and agencies—which he has appointed in His infinite wisdom. And, very possibly, an enlarging of our knowledge, so that we better understand God's sphere of operations, will show us that even the most extraordinary miracles are God working among, and by, the forces which He has established, rather than in any new ways beyond or outside them.

How would we try to restore suspended life? Evidently we should aim at two things, restoration of bodily warmth and revival

of the breathing process. Both these are illustrated by the means used for the recovery of the drowned. Now Elijah, and Elisha subsequently, *used the appropriate means*. This stretching on the body was designed to impart natural warmth. Comparing the case recorded, in the life of Elisha (2 Kings iv. 34), we may assume that 'mouth was put to mouth' in order to breathe living breath into the lung. Of themselves such agencies could not be efficient to secure the revival of life, but with the blessing of God they could be. No means are efficient of themselves; and this is the great lesson which we have to learn from such incidents. God is the efficient power that energizes all agencies so that they secure the ends desired. Means are put in our control, and the use of them at once illustrates and cultures character; but results are wholly with God, and He may, if He please, bless our instrumentality to the restoring of life.

There have been cases in which, after every ordinary method has been tried in vain, life has been brought back by the inbreathing of living breath and the impartation of natural warmth.

It should not be forgotten that prayer is an agency, or that the use of means and efforts in connection with prayer is the proper expression to God of our faith in Him as the Prayer-hearer. It is no due honouring of God to pray, and then idly wait until He works wonders. True honouring of God lies in praying, and using suitable instrumentalities, in the assured confidence that God will graciously work His wonders through the instrumentalities. It is the law of Divine relations with men, which has its application in every sphere, that we must 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling,' for the very reason that 'it is God who worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.'

*Kitto* says: 'He felt the true mountain-moving faith heaving strong within him, and he gave it unrestrained vent. He threw himself upon the corpse, as if, in the vehement energy of his will, to force his own life into it; and he cried, with mighty and resistless urgency, to God, to send back to this cold frame the breath He had taken.'

*Keil*, and other writers, think that Elijah's action was taken, 'not for the purpose of imparting natural warmth to revive and quicken the dormant physical energies, but to communicate the quickening power of God.' But it may fairly be urged that this rather adds to than relieves the difficulties of the passage, seeing that three supreme efforts are represented as being necessary.

*Dr. H. Allon* is an authority for the assertion that 'the original Hebrew does not explicitly affirm the death of this son, but only his dying condition,' or collapse.

## Dividing the Jordan.

2 KINGS ii. 8 : 'And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.'

**Question.**—*How does this miraculous dividing of the waters differ from that which occurred in the time of Joshua? (See paragraph on Josh. iii. 13, 16.)*

**Answer.**—This is in one sense a *greater* miracle, and in another sense a *smaller* miracle. The sphere is smaller; it was wrought in behalf of two persons, not of a nation; the river was in its ordinary condition, and not in flood; and the passage only needed to be made for the few moments of the crossing. But it is a greater miracle, from the human point of view, because it seems to be a more direct action of God, apart from the use of any natural agency which we can conceive. So far as we can trace the position of the crossing, there does not appear to have been any known ford at the spot; and no suggestion can be made of wind or earthquake producing the desired effect. All signs of control over the action of 'water' strikes us, in a very impressive way, as being Divine; and therefore none of our Lord's miracles convince us more of His Divine power and rights than His 'stilling the storm' and 'walking upon the waters.' Though mentioned in quite a casual way, as if it were but one of the incidents of this most extraordinary day in the prophet's history, there are few Old Testament miracles which so fully illustrate what may be called the older idea of miracle, as the control of God over the forces of nature, so as to make them do contrary to their custom in working out His will. Of course a momentary arrest of the waters is all that was necessary, as the lower waters would swiftly drain away, and the bottom of the swift-flowing Jordan is stony, not muddy. But this sudden stoppage of the flowing stream is precisely what no human power could accomplish in a moment; and we must fully accept it as an immediate Divine intervention on behalf of, and as a witness to, his faithful servant.

It may be well to correct the exaggerated notion which is commonly entertained concerning the width and depth of the river Jordan. American travellers especially are greatly disappointed with it, after the magnificent rivers of their country, and it will not even bear comparison with the larger rivers of our own land. *Dr. Thomson* says: 'The Jordan would scarcely be dignified with the name of river in America, and its appearance is, in reality, quite insignificant. Travellers have differed widely in the description of the

Jordan, principally from two causes—visiting it at different *seasons* of the year, and at different *places*. When and where I saw it, the width might have been twenty yards, and its depth ten feet.’ Being the principal stream of Palestine, the Jordan has acquired a distinction much greater than its geographical importance could have given it.

## The Use of Prophetic Signs.

1 SAMUEL x. 7: ‘And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.’ (See ver. 1-6.)

**Question.**—*What precise object had Samuel in view in thus foretelling the incidents of the day?*

**Answer.**—We may be sure that he wanted to convince the new king that what he had done had been done under Divine direction, and consequently that Saul entered on his office with assurance of Divine favour and acceptance. Samuel acted in his capacity as a *Seer*, one who could anticipate coming events. The accordance of the events with the foretelling satisfied Saul that Samuel had acted on *authority*.

*Jamieson* says: ‘The design of these specific predictions of what should be met with on the way, and the number and minuteness of which would arrest attention, was to confirm Saul’s reliance on the prophetic character of Samuel, and lead him to give full credence to what had been revealed to him as the word of God.’

But there was a further object, and one more directly bearing on the future of the new king. He was to receive a special endowment for his kingship, and the connection of the coming of this spiritual power with foregoing prophecy compelled Saul to recognise it as a *Divine* endowment. But for this close association with the words of Jehovah’s prophet, it would have been easy for him to think, and for men to say, that he was only caught up, and carried away, by the enthusiasm and ecstasy of the company he joined.

The supremely important event of the day was ‘the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him,’ as prophesied in verse 6; and the other signs did but magnify this sign, and help to convince Saul that he had the Divine grace for reigning, as well as the Divine call to be king.

To impress this further point, it may be well to show what must be understood by this ‘turning Saul into another man.’ The *Speaker’s Commentary* note is very suggestive. ‘The expression is a remarkable one, and occurs nowhere else. Doubtless it describes

the change in point of mental power and energy which would result from the influx of the Spirit of the Lord. In the case of Samson it was a supernatural bodily strength, in the case of Saul a capacity for ruling and leading the people of which he was before destitute, which the Spirit wrought in him. The change in the mental power of the Apostles, as described in Acts i. 8, is analogous. Compare Isaiah xi. 2-4. The change is described in verse 9 by saying that "God gave him another heart." The heart in the Hebrew acceptation points more to intellect and courage than to the affections and conscience.'

*Kitto* says: 'It will occur to most readers, that although these words describe Saul as being turned into *another* man, they do not declare that he was turned into a *new* one; and although they have reference to a lesser work of the Holy Spirit than His regenerating and sanctifying work, they are remarkably typical or adumbrative of that larger and greater work of God in the soul of man. It is observable that this coming of the Spirit of God upon Saul, and turning him into another man, was properly his introduction to the kingdom, and constituted his fitness for it. It was the proper sequel to and completion of the operation commenced by his anointing, and by it he acquired all the fitness he ever possessed for the kingdom.'

*Canon Spence* takes the view that the three prophetic signs were designed to be precisely instructive to the new king, in relation to his future work; and this view cannot be so well presented as in Canon Spence's own words:

'Each of these tokens, which were to strengthen the young Saul's faith, contained a solemn lesson, the deep meaning of which, as his life went on, the future sovereign would be able to ponder over. Each of the three signs from heaven met him at one of the sacred spots which were so plentifully dotted over these southern districts of Canaan, memorable for the life-stories, first of Abraham and the patriarchs, and then of the warrior-chieftains of the Israel of the conquest. The selection of localities famous as homes of prayer, or sacred as the resting-place of the illustrious dead, taught the eternal truth that "help comes from the holy place." At the sepulchre of Rachel, the loved ancestress of the warlike tribe of Benjamin, to which the new king belonged, men should meet him on his homeward journey with the news that the lost asses which he had gone to seek were found again. This showed him that henceforth in his new life he was to dismiss all lower cares, and give himself up alone to higher and more important matters. A king must take counsel and thought for the weal of a whole people; he must put aside now and for ever all consideration for himself and his family, all anxiety

for the mere ordinary prosperity of life. God, who had chosen him, would provide for these things, as He had now done in the case of the lost asses. Further on in his journey, when he reached the terebinth-tree of Tabor, three men on a pilgrimage to the great Beth-el sanctuary would meet him, and would offer him some of the loaves which they proposed offering at Beth-el. The significance of this peculiar gift was that some portion of the products of the soil, which had hitherto been appropriated exclusively to the service and support of the sanctuary, in future should be devoted to the maintenance of the anointed of the Lord. The third sign which he should perceive would meet him as he approached his home, which was situated near a famous holy place of prayer, known as the "Gibeah," or "Hill of God." A number of prophets belonging to one of the "schools" of the prophets founded by Samuel, coming from the altar on the "Hill of God," where sacrifice had just been offered, would meet him. They would be plunged in prophetic raptures; he would hear them chanting hymns to the Eternal, accompanied by the music of their instruments. A new and mighty influence, Samuel told the astonished Saul, would, as he met this company of singers, come upon him, and involuntarily he, who evidently had never joined before in any of these solemn choruses, would sing his part with the rest. The new influence, said the old Seer, which would then come upon him would be the Spirit of the Lord, and from that moment he would be a changed man. Never in his after-days of glory and of might was the king to forget how, in a moment, the Divine power had swept down and given him—the ignorant shepherd, the humble vine-dresser, the heir to a few asses and sheep, to some fields of corn or vineyards—wisdom, power, and a mighty kingdom. He must remember that, in a moment, the same Divine power might wing away from him its solemn flight; that was the lesson of the third sign which was to meet him on his homeward journey.'

## The Revelation of the Blazing but Unconsumed Bush.

EXODUS iii. 2: 'And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.'

**Question.**—*Was this merely designed to draw the attention of Moses; or may we regard it as a revelation of God in His relationship to His enslaved people?*

**Answer.**—It is much too remarkable and too impressive a scene to be regarded only as a call of Moses to attention. It is hardly

possible to conceive of a more impressive symbol of the condition of the people in Egypt than is afforded by the bank of bushes burning with fire; and nothing could more effectively convince of the Divine care than the observed fact that, though the blaze was fierce, the bushes were not consumed. The outward symbol prepared for the Divine communication. There was a future before the nation that was kept safe amid the bondages and hardships of the Egyptian rule. God was keeping it, and, in His own good time, the 'Keeper' could and would deliver.

The scene has been thus described, so as to bring out its points of special interest: 'Moses had followed his flocks of sheep and goats as they sought the aromatic shrubs on the ledges of the rocks, or in the folds of the narrow valley or by the side of chance springs; little thinking to what they were leading him. The wild acacia, the *senek* of the Hebrew Bible—a gnarled and thorny tree, not unlike our solitary hawthorn in its growth—dotted the bare slopes and the burning soil of the ravines. But now, suddenly, a glow of flame, like that which was consuming Israel in the furnace of affliction, shines forth amidst the dry branches of one of those before him, and yet, as he gazes, "the bush," though "it burned with fire," was not consumed. Drawing near to "see this great sight," a voice, which he instinctively recognises as Divine, sounds from its midst, commanding him to remove his sandals as on holy ground; revealing new and closer relations of God to His chosen people, and imposing on the awed shepherd' the work of bringing the people out of the fires.

*Keble* expresses the message of the unconsuming bush thus:

'And hark! amid the flashing fire,  
Mingling with tones of fear and ire,  
Soft Mercy's undersong—  
'Tis Abraham's God who speaks so loud,  
His people's cry have pierc'd the cloud,  
He sees, He sees their wrong.'

*Jamieson*, supporting the symbolical view of the burning bush, says: 'It is generally supposed to have been emblematic of the Israelites' condition in Egypt—oppressed by a grinding servitude and a bloody persecution, and yet, in spite of the cruel policy that was bent on annihilating them, they continued as numerous and thriving as ever. The reason was, "God was in the midst of them."'

## Fallen Dagon.

**I SAMUEL v. 3 :** 'And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Would not such an incident tend to give the Philistines a wrong idea of Jehovah, as if He were really present in the Ark?*

**Answer.**—This is one of the cases which must be studied strictly in the light of the sentiments and superstitions of the times. It has been pointed out that 'revelation' must always be 'accommodation'; it must be God graciously adapting Himself to the spheres of knowledge, and to the everyday associations, of those whom He would teach. Jehovah, in this case, is adapting Himself to these Philistines, so that He might become a power and persuasion upon them. He is meeting them on their own level. He is convincing them of His superiority, by making their idol-god bow down before the symbol of His presence. The image symbolized their god; and the Ark symbolized Jehovah. The relations of the symbols at once suggested the supreme and unique claims of Jehovah. This is a case of symbol-teaching, or, as we say, picture-teaching. And it illustrates the Divine control of forces that, though natural, are beyond our experience, and so by us must be called 'supernatural.'

*Layard* tells that, in one of the bas-reliefs discovered at Khorsabad, and representing the war of an Assyrian king—probably Sargon—with the inhabitants of the coast of Syria, a figure is seen swimming in the sea, with the upper part of the body resembling a bearded man wearing the ordinary conical tiara of royalty, adorned with elephants' tusks, and the lower part resembling the body of a fish. It has the hand lifted up, as if in astonishment or fear, and is surrounded by fishes, crabs, and other marine animals. *Keil* thinks this must be a representation of the Philistine Dagon: 'This deity was a personification of the generative and vivifying principle of nature, for which the fish, with its innumerable multiplication, was specially adapted, and set forth the idea of the Giver of all earthly good.'

Up to this point the Philistines had triumphed over the Israelites; or we may say that Dagon had been allowed for a time to triumph over Jehovah. But now Jehovah must vindicate Himself. Philistines had been used by Him as executors of His judgments on His sinful people; but Philistines must be taught not to presume: they must learn that even they could only win successes by the permissions of the one and only true God, before whom their very idol must bow. They must see him lie in the attitude of a vanquished enemy and a

suppliant, and this picture of humiliation significantly declared the superiority of the God of Israel.

*Bishop Wordsworth* says: 'Dagon, in his own temple, fell down like a prisoner before his conqueror, or like a suppliant before his god.'

*Dr. C. Geikie*, regarding the Ark as one of the spoils of war, says: 'But such spoils were held even then, by not a few, as of doubtful value; the thoughtful fearing that the hatred and vengeance of the god so insulted might be visited on his captors. Thus the wiser among the Romans criticised the conduct of Marcellus, who first brought Grecian statues and pictures of the gods to their city to adorn his triumph; thinking better of the course followed by Fabius, who, in taking Tarentum, had told his army to leave to the Tarentines the gods offended with them.'

## Deaths of the Sacrilegious.

LEVITICUS x. 1, 2: 'And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord' (*Rev. Ver.*).

NUMBERS xvi. 31-33: 'And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit; and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*These destructions seem to be extraordinarily severe, especially in that they included the innocent with the guilty.*

**Explanation.**—Neither of these incidents can be rightly understood unless we distinctly realize that God was the actual King and Ruler of Israel, as directly ordering, judging, legislating, rewarding, as if, in bodily person, He was seated on a throne. Our notions of God make it very difficult for us to enter into the thought of God that possessed the Israelite race. To them He was General of the army, King of the nation, and supreme Judge for all civil and criminal cases.

We may therefore take analogies from the methods which Eastern kings find it necessary to adopt. And two things are essential to vigorous and secure rule: (1) sufficient severity in judgment to duly impress spectators, and declare the king's estimate of the sin; and (2) prompt and effective crushing out of all incipient rebellions. Both of these are illustrated in the cases before us; and the miraculous form which, in each case, the judgment took, only served to impress the fact that their unseen King possessed a direct *executive*

power, and the control of forces which were wholly beyond their understanding. A wholesome fear was thus created, which would check self-willedness, and help to the maintaining of obedience.

We have here mainly to do with the miraculous features of the deaths. In the case of Nadab and Abihu there appears to have been a more strictly supernatural agency. The shekinah light seems to have flashed forth from the Holy of Holies, and smitten the two priests with instant death. We can only compare the effect to that produced by a lightning flash. It was, as it were, the stroke of the insulted and indignant King. In the case of Korah, and his companions, there was an incipient rebellion against the unseen King, and this must be dealt with at once, and strongly, for the rebellious spirit is wont to spread very swiftly. It must be dealt with in such a way as would convince the people that the unseen King took the matter into His own hands, and vindicated His rights by the use of forces, in the execution of His judgments, which were strictly in His own control.

On the severity of the judgment that fell on Nadab and Abihu, *Kitto* says: 'It was necessary. At any time the offence would have been very grievous; but at this time, when the ritual service was so newly established, and just coming into regular operation, such an infraction of it by the very persons whose official charge it was to maintain its sacredness, demanded a most rigid punishment, even a miraculous interposition, to protect the sacred service, and indeed the whole law, from that disesteem on the part of the people which might naturally have resulted from it, if it had been passed over without the severest notice.'

On the second case *Ewald* has the following very valuable and suggestive note: 'The cause of the insurrection of Korah, of the tribe of Levi, and of the elders Dathan, Abiram, and On, of the tribe of Reuben, with their two hundred and fifty followers, appears very clearly to have been a low jealousy of the prophetic supremacy of Moses, and of the priestly power of Aaron, founded upon an overstrained interpretation of the nature of the community as just then set forth by Moses; implying that from the newly promulgated idea that the community was to be holy and the seat of Jahveh, it followed that the individual was already holy and perfect, and consequently had no need of any earthly guidance, priestly or other. Undoubtedly every age, which like the Mosaic first brings strongly to light the highest truths respecting the idea of the community, must contain also within its bosom a multitude of misunderstandings and excesses, false imitations and vain pretensions, as the histories of the first ages

of Christianity and of Islam abundantly teach us. The occurrence of a mutiny based upon views so strange might even be adduced as a fresh proof that those exalted views respecting the nature of the community were at that time vividly felt and widely spread. The fact that from the tribe of Reuben three elders rose up in jealousy against the new power of Levi, although themselves obliged to seek a Levite as their confederate, agrees very well with the earliest history of the twelve tribes. But certainly there is nothing intrinsically more dangerous and reprehensible than the employment of such exalted truths for selfish ends, and the abuse of such freedom as a cloak for personal ambition, lawlessness, and dissolution of all order, as if the holiest things given to man could be trifled with with impunity. Against those who thus seek to use holy truths and blessings merely as a means of universal corruption, the Holy itself turns round and becomes their instantaneous destruction.'

A careful study of the narrative leads to the assumption that Korah and his company died by fire coming out from the Holy of Holies, just as Nadab and Abihu died; and that the opening of the earth, and sudden engulfing, refers only to the Reubenites, who stood at their tent-doors, apparently in a spirit of contumacious defiance.

### The Coming of Elijah.

**MALACHI iv. 5:** 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Is it reasonable to regard this promise as an assurance of the return to the earth of the actual Elijah?*

**Answer.**—Not if we apprehend the figurative and poetical character of the prophetical Scriptures. One who would do for his age a similar work to that which was done by Elijah for his age would, in Scripture, be called an Elijah. Moreover, we have our Lord's own intimation that John Baptist fulfilled this promise. 'If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.' There is no occasion whatever for imagining that any miraculous re-appearance of Elijah was in the mind of Malachi, or a part of his prophetic message. The Jews overpressed a literal interpretation, and to this day they earnestly pray for the coming of Elias, which, they assume, will immediately precede the appearance of Messiah.

'Elijah was the prophet for whose return in later years his countrymen have looked with most eager hope. . . . It was a fixed belief of the Jews that he had appeared again and again, as an Arabian merchant, to wise and good rabbis at their prayers or on their journeys.

A seat is still placed for him to superintend the circumcision of the Jewish children. Passover after passover, the Jews of our own day place the paschal cup on the table, and set the door wide open, believing that that is the moment when Elijah will reappear. When goods are found, and no owner comes; when difficulties arise, and no solution appears, the answer is "Put them by till Elijah comes."—*Dean Stanley.*

Our Lord's teaching is, for us, an all-sufficing commentary on the intentions and meanings of the allusion to Elijah found in Malachi. 'And they asked Him, saying, The Scribes say that Elijah must first come. And He said unto them, Elijah indeed cometh first and restoreth all things: and how is it written of the Son of man, that He should suffer many things and be set at nought? But I say unto you, that Elijah is come, and they have also done unto him whatsoever they listed, even as it is written of him' (Mark ix. 11-13, *Rev. Ver.*)

### Miraculous Signs.

EXODUS iv. 2, 3, 6: 'And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.' 'And the Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow.'

**Question.**—*May we regard these signs as illustrating the use of miracles as the credentials of a person, rather than evidences of the truth of the message he delivers?*

**Answer.**—They were plainly wrought for the convincement and satisfaction of Moses himself, and so far may be said to resemble the signs granted to Gideon, Hezekiah, etc. The hesitation of Moses to accept the Divine commission was natural and sincere, though wrong. It was very gracious of God so patiently to bear with his infirmity, and encourage him to undertake the charge. Moses had not quite got over the sense of failure which came when he attempted to champion the Hebrews, and was compelled to flee for his own life. It was hardly reasonable to suppose that Pharaoh would heed a verbal message from a desert shepherd, even if he granted that shepherd royal audience. Moses would be in peril of being rejected, and even put to death as an impostor.

God graciously intimated that Moses should be endowed with miraculous powers, and enabled to do such mighty works as would demand public attention to his message, and secure his personal safety, by creating a superstitious fear of him. But it was necessary to give Moses some idea of what the miraculous power would be;

and the two miracles—of the rod and the leprosy—were types or specimens of the kinds of miracles he would be enabled to work. They convinced Moses that God would be with him, and the power of God would work through him. Or, rather, they *should* have convinced him, for it is painful to observe that even after such Divine encouragements, he resists the acceptance of the Divine charge. It is never true humility to refuse any duty to which God plainly calls us.

On these verses *Canon Rawlinson* says: 'The words give Divine sanction to the view, so strangely combated of late, that the power of working miracles is given to men, primarily and mainly, for its evidential value, to accredit them as God's messengers. Without the gift of miracles neither would Moses have persuaded the Israelites, nor would the Apostles have converted the world.'

## The Vision of the Captain of the Host.

JOSHUA v. 13: And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

**Question.**—*Is this to be regarded as a mental vision? And if so, ought visions to be classed among miracles?*

**Answer.**—It is well to distinguish between miracles and visions, as differing methods in which the Divine Being communicates His will to men; for miracles are quite as essentially 'revelations' as visions are. The term 'miracles' should be kept for special Divine operations in the sphere of *nature*. The term 'visions' should be used for special Divine operations in the sphere of *mind*. But both may be called 'miracles,' if by that term we understand direct, and unusual, Divine interventions and operations.

We understand the scene here narrated to be a mental vision, and that what Joshua really saw in his mind, he thought of as if it were an objective reality. Perhaps the incident with which it may be best compared, is the vision given to Paul on the way to Damascus, though that was accompanied with a flashing light which Paul's companions saw. Paul alone saw Jesus, or heard the voice.

If we understand that an actual form appeared before the bodily eyes of Joshua, and actual words were heard by his bodily ears, then we may compare this case with the angel appearances to Abraham, Gideon, Manoah, etc. Probably a fuller understanding of the mysteries of the human mind, and its power of creating scenes which seem to itself to have external reality—the power of the imagination

to convince itself of the reality of its imaginings—would allow us at once to class Joshua's experience among 'mental visions.' God can just as truly and as fully use those powers of mind which He has Himself given, as the powers of nature which He has Himself created. His agency may be direct upon mind; it need not always be mediate, through the senses. And there are what we may call 'mind-miracles' as well as 'nature-miracles.'

The commentators agree in seeing in this 'Captain of the Host' an appearance of God manifested in the Person of His Word—a foreshadowing of the Incarnation. But it strikes an independent reader that such an explanation is suggested by the exigencies of a theological system, and that something much more simple will meet all the necessities of the cases.

*Dr. C. Stanford* writes so as to suggest the visionary character of the scene: 'We may be sure that this hour of pause was to their leader an hour of prayer. . . . In this mood he went forth alone to reconnoitre the place. While he was there thinking and thinking, all at once there glimmered in the twilight over against him the figure of "a man with a drawn sword in his hand."'

### Safety in a Fiery Furnace.

DANIEL iii. 25: 'He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*In this account there seems to be a curious blending of vision and history.*

**Explanation.**—The rendering given in the Revised Version relieves the great difficulty which has always been felt in the identification of the fourth person in the fire as the Son of God. It is evident that only Nebuchadnezzar saw this fourth person, and that the noble or godlike form he observed suggested to him that the men in the fire were under special Divine protection. It must be remembered that Nebuchadnezzar was, at the time, in a very excited state, and his suffering from what is called lycanthropy, or a diseased imagination that he was an animal, suggests the sensitiveness of his imagination. This part of the story belongs to the king alone. No idea is suggested as to the three young men recognising that a fourth was with them.

The miracles of preservation recorded in the Book of Daniel are extraordinary instances of the Providence that watches over God's servants, more especially when they are called to witness, work, or suffer for God. Their mission probably was to convince the people

of Israel that God's Providence was watching over them, and keeping them safe, through all the years and perils of their captivity. It may have been partly designed, by these miracles, to produce, in the minds of the Babylonians, a wholesome fear of Jehovah ; but we may look for their chief purpose in the comforting and reassuring of God's own afflicted people.

There is no reason to suppose that the three youths expected any miraculous deliverance. They proposed to themselves no more than a firm and strict obedience, whatever it might cost, and anticipated a speedy death.

The *Speaker's Commentary* says : 'It is a question still unsolved. Did others besides the king see "four men loose," etc. ? The narrative would admit it ; the courtiers' stereotyped reply, "True, O king," is not of much weight for or against this view ; but the older belief has been that this "sight"—an object sight, and not a vision—was granted unto the king alone. What did the expression "a son of the gods" mean, as used by Nebuchadnezzar ? It was the language of one educated in and familiar with the Babylonian belief in gods. From the union of Bel and Mylitta had sprung a divine progeny of "sons ;" and one of those divine visitors had vouchsafed to appear now, an "angel" (lit., "messenger," ver. 28) of deliverance to Shadrach and his fellows.'

### Miraculous Imitations.

EXODUS vii. 11 : 'Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did in like manner with their enchantments (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that these magicians succeeded in producing identical results, or did they simply deceive by false appearances, or make changes by sleight of hand ?*

**Answer.**—Some have supposed that the magicians of Egypt were really in possession of supernatural powers, obtained by a connection with evil spirits ; but an examination of their writings does not support any such representation. They are full of charms, which were believed to exert a powerful effect, producing or removing disease, and averting evil. 'On the whole, it is perhaps most probable that the magicians were merely persons acquainted with many secrets of nature not generally known, and trained in tricks of sleight of hand and conjuring.'

The things which they accomplished were certainly not beyond the skill and power of the Eastern conjuror. Moses describes the effect produced on the spectators ; he must not be understood as asserting

hat they did exactly the same thing as he did. They produced the same *appearances*, and this would satisfy the king, who did not want to believe in the Divine commission of Moses. The appearance served to provide an excuse, and the king was not anxious to make inquiries that would dispel any delusions. It is indeed quite probable that he believed in the supernatural powers of his jugglers; but his belief did not make such supernatural power the actual fact. The *Koran* represents the magicians as deceiving the people by acting upon their imaginations.

*Jamieson* well expresses all that can be said on this subject. Pharaoh's object in calling them was to ascertain whether this doing of Aaron's was really a work of Divine power, or merely a feat of magical art. The magicians of Egypt in modern times have been long celebrated adepts in charming serpents, and, particularly by pressing the nape of the neck, they throw them into a kind of catalepsy, which renders them stiff and immovable—this seeming to change them into a rod. They conceal the serpent about their persons, and, by acts of legerdemain, produce it from their dress, stiff and straight as a rod. Just the same trick was played off by their ancient predecessors, the most renowned of whom, Jannes and Mambres (2 Tim. iii. 8), were called in on this occasion. They had time after the summons to make suitable preparations—and so it appears that they succeeded, by their "enchantments," in practising an illusion on the senses.'

The imitation of the blood-coloured water was even an easier thing. Changing colours of liquids is quite a common conjuror's trick. It is managed by sleight of hand. In those days appearances were treated as realities, and no rigorous scientific examinations were required. Things were easily accepted as being what it seemed as if they were. Both miracles, and imitations of miracles, must be studied in the light of the credulity and superstition of the age in which they were wrought.

### Signs granted to Gideon.

JUDGES vi. 36, 37: 'And Gideon said unto God, If Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the ground, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast spoken' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Was Gideon justified in thus asking for an interference with the order of nature for the confirmation of his faith?*

**Answer.**—Such a putting God to the test would certainly be wholly wrong in us. We must never act as if, for a moment, we

doubted God's word. For Gideon to ask signs for the confirming of his faith is no example to us who know God so much better than he could. His act must be judged in the light of his character, and of the sentiments of his age, and of the peculiar difficulty of his circumstances. He was called to a seemingly hopeless task. His only chance of success lay in special Divine power exerted on his behalf, and it was but natural, though distinctly wrong, that Gideon should ask for the encouragement of seeing what the Divine power could do. It is evident that there were grave questions in Gideon's mind as to whether he was right in asking these signs, for, in presenting the second request, he says: 'Let not Thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once.' We can only see an instance of Divine condescension, and gracious adaptation to the precise circumstances of the time, in God's thus allowing Himself to be *put to the test*.

It must, however, be distinctly noted that Gideon asked *with a desire and purpose to trust and obey*. Our Lord refused signs to Pharisees who asked in a mood of *doubting*, and with the hope of maintaining their doubts. If there is faith God may be pleased graciously to confirm it with signs. No signs will create faith, for the man disposed to object can always raise objections, and rebut the best evidences.

It is noticed that the first sign might be a purely natural result. 'Everyone must have noticed flocks of wool on the hedges, sparkling with dewdrops long after the dew on the leaves around them has evaporated.' *Lord Bacon* is the authority for the statement that 'Sailors have used every night to hang fleeces of wool on the sides of their ships towards the water, and they have crushed fresh water out of them in the morning.' The second result, being contrary to nature, could only have been reached by Divine interposition.

*Kitto* thinks Gideon asked these signs rather to authenticate his mission to the people, than for the confirming of his own faith. 'The tenor of the request is expressed in such a manner as would have been offensive to any man of spirit, who had given solemn assurances to another; but the Lord is very merciful, very long-suffering—more of both than man—and Gideon's request was granted without a rebuke. Perhaps, also, the terms employed are to be regarded as not so much the emanation of his own feeling, as his mode of stating the case for the understanding of his people.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* says: 'The caution of Gideon is remarkable. It is impossible to conceive anything more remote from a credulous enthusiasm. Distinguish between ~~the~~ desire to be assured

that he really had a promise from God, and doubts as to God's faithfulness or power to fulfil His promise. Of the latter there is not a trace in Gideon's character. He is a worthy example of faith.'

Dean Stanley greatly admires Gideon: 'He was, we should say, before his age. He himself remains as a character apart, faintly understood by others, imperfectly fulfilling his own ideas, staggering under a burden to which he was not equal.'

## Nile Waters turned to Blood.

Exodus vii. 17, 18: 'Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord; behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink water from the river.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that the water was turned into actual blood, or that it was changed in character, and the new character resembled blood?*

**Answer.**—If we may reasonably limit the miracle to what was necessary in producing due impressions on Pharaoh and his people, we may certainly assume that the water was turned into a blood-colour, and not into actual blood. To make the waters of the land actual blood was a miracle quite beyond the demands of the occasion. It is not a question whether God *could* do such a thing, but whether He *would* do such a thing, in particular circumstances, when a miracle running along the lines of ordinary nature would suffice. It is a principle of human action, that a thing is not really efficient which is *beyond the occasion*. And this principle may reverently be applied to God.

The incident must be viewed in the light of facts that are known concerning the Nile, and of the sentiments entertained by the Egyptians concerning it.

The admiration for the Nile water strikes us as extravagant and ridiculous. It was said that if Mahomet had once tasted the stream, he would have asked an immortality on earth that he might enjoy it or ever. The water of the Nile was sent, as a present fit for royalty to receive, to distant kings and queens. The Egyptians were accustomed to use the Nile water for drinking, for ablutions, for the washing of their clothes, and for culinary purposes; they have great difficulty in procuring any other; they delight in the Nile water; think it the best in the world, and are in the habit of drinking deep draughts of it continually. 'The waters of Egypt consist of the main stream of the Nile; its branches; canals derived from it; natural

lakes, pools, and ponds, either left by the inundation, or anticipative of it, being derived by percolation from the main stream; and artificial reservoirs of a larger or smaller size in gardens, courts, and houses. There is no other stream but the Nile in the whole country; and there are no natural springs, fountains, or brooks. Water may, however, at all times, and in all parts of the Nile Valley, be obtained by digging wells; but, as the soil is impregnated with nitre, the water is highly unpalatable.'

In a natural way the Nile does, at times, show a blood-red colour. Before the annual rise the water is green and unfit to drink without filtration. About the end of June it changes to a yellowish colour, which gradually becomes reddish, like ochre. Probably this is owing to red earth borne down by the flood from Sennaar, but Ehrenberg seems to prove his assertion that it is really owing to the presence of microscopic cryptogams and *infusoria*. It is said that at such seasons the broad turbid tide has a striking resemblance to a river of blood.

But this natural redness of the Nile materially differed from the redness produced by Divine power through the agency of Moses. It does not render the water unfit for drinking, nor does it kill the fishes. We may say, with *Kitto*, 'We do not suppose that there was actual blood, but that the water became red as blood, and acquired such properties as not only destroyed the fish, but caused the Egyptians to loathe to drink from the stream which they, not without reason, regarded as affording the most delicious water in the world.'

It may further be said that the Nile water at times has a distinctly offensive odour naturally.

Very possibly, therefore, the miracle took the form of an exaggeration of the natural peculiarities of the river. The intenser colour, and the stronger odour, intimating a condition making the waters offensive to man, and perilous to the fishes.

*Dr. C. Geikie* collects some curious instances of waters becoming blood-red in colour, and blood-looking spots appearing on bleaching linen, etc., which are important as suggesting the natural agencies which may have been used. 'Ehrenberg saw, in 1823, the whole bay of the Red Sea, at Sinai, turned into the colour of blood by the presence of cryptogamous plants. Similarly, the Elbe ran with what seemed blood, for several days, in the beginning of this century. The Nile, also, has been known to have the same look, and to remain blood-like and fetid for months. In *Siliman's Journal* there is an account of a fountain of blood in a cave in South America. It grew solid, and burst bottles into which it was put, and dogs ate it

greedily. Before the potato rot in 1846 small red spots appeared on linen laid out to bleach, and in 1848, Eckhardt, of Berlin, saw the same on potatoes in the house of a cholera patient ; the spots in this last case proving to be caused by one of the algæ—*Palmella prodigiosa*. In 1852 a similar appearance on food, both animal and vegetable, was noticed in France, by M. Montague. In 1825, Lake Morat became like blood in different parts. In the steppes of Siberia, also, lakes have been noticed thus strangely discoloured. In the time of the Reformation, M. Merle d'Aubigné tells us, blood seemed in some parts of Switzerland to flow from the earth, from walls and other sources, and the same thing has been noticed on bread, at Tours, in A.D. 503 ; at Spires, in 1103 ; at Rochelle, in 1163 ; at Namur, in 1193 ; and elsewhere at various times. The cause of these wonders is a minute alga which grows so rapidly that it actually flows, and is so small that there are from 46,656,000,000,000 to 884,736,000,000,000 plants in a cubic inch.'

In Osburn's *Monumental History of Egypt* is the following interesting passage : 'The sun was just rising over the Arabian hills, and I was surprised to see that the moment its beams struck the water a deep-red reflection was caused. The intensity of the red grew with the increase of the light, so that even before the disk of the sun had risen completely above the hills the Nile offered the appearance of a river of blood. Suspecting some illusion, I rose quickly, and leaning over the side of the boat, found my first impression confirmed. The entire mass of the waters was opaque, and of a dark red, more like blood than anything else to which I could compare it. At the same time I saw that the river had risen some inches during the night, and the Arabs came to tell me it was the *Red Nile*.'

*Geikie* thinks that if 'the waters had been turned into *real blood*, the smell of its corrupting would have killed every living creature, both man and beast, long before the seven days had ended.' Perhaps we can only venture to say that, even to those who knew the Nile well, the phenomena were so unusual, and so revolting, as to indicate not only the power but the judgment of God. The waters became as offensive, loathsome, and dangerous, as if they had been changed into the blood which, in colour, they so greatly resembled.

## Stopped Mouths of Lions.

DANIEL vi. 22 : 'My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me ; forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me ; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.'

**Question.**—*Can we realize how the Median Darius would regard this Divine intervention for the safety of Daniel ?*

**Answer.**—He was a worshipper of Ormazd, or Ormuzd, the good god ; and believed in a being known as Sraosha or Serosh—Ormazd's messenger or angel, and the 'protector of the true faith.' He would, therefore, quite understand Daniel's language, in harmony with his own knowledge and notions.

'The most common representatives of the *evil* powers in which the Medo-Persian believed were lions winged and unwinged. The walls of Persepolis, and coins, pictured the king—Ormazd's representative on earth—as the recognised opponent and destroyer of the lions, and so of the evil which they symbolized. What King Darius had failed to do, what Ormazd—according to the Median creed—would have had Darius do, that "God's angel had done."—*Speaker's Commentary*.

*Dean Stanley* tells us that 'the story of the Den of Lions is told in three different versions—the one in the Hebrew, most generally known, which places the incident under Darius the Mede ; the second, in the Greek, which places it under Cyrus, in connection with the intrigues of the priests of Bel ; the third, in John of Malala, who places it also under Cyrus, from Daniel's refusal to answer the question whether he shall succeed against Cræsus. It is the second of these which the early Christians of the Catacombs adopted when they painted the youth standing upright in prayer naked between the lions, and relieved by the flight of Habakkuk the prophet from Palestine to Babylon, a grotesque addition to the Hebrew record, redeemed by the fine answer of the captive : "Thou hast remembered me, O God, neither hast Thou forsaken them that seek Thee and love Thee."'

On the proofs afforded by the monuments of this mode of dealing with criminals in Babylon, Kitto gives very interesting details in his *Daily Bible Illustrations*.

This miracle, as a private and personal Divine preservation, may be classed with the feeding of Elijah by the ravens. Its lesson for all ages seems to be, that Divine Providence will surely be on the side of, and work for, all those who bear good character. This may be accepted as the usual fact. 'Godliness has the promise of the

life that now is.' If in any case such Providential preservations and benedictions seem to fail, we must always look for some overruling 'need's be.' If the good man suffers, it is because higher ends of blessing—for the man himself or for others—can be accomplished by the suffering than could have been accomplished by the usual benediction. But life for us all may be lived under this ever-ennobling conviction—*God is on the side of the good.*

### Rise of Samuel at Endor.

1 SAMUEL xxviii. 13, 14 : 'And the woman said unto Saul, I see a god coming up out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a robe. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance' (Rev. Ver.).

**Question.**—*Was this raising of Samuel something which, we are to understand, could be accomplished by the woman's incantations; or were both the woman and the king surprised at the result which she appeared to achieve?*

**Answer.**—There can be no doubt that Saul was superstitious enough to believe that the woman had occult powers, and could bring the spirits of the dead to hold converse with the living. But even he was surprised when he found Samuel appeared in bodily form. The narrative does not make it quite clear whether the king actually saw the form of Samuel, or whether the woman only saw, and the communications between Samuel and Saul were made through her. The woman was evidently frightened at results which she knew were quite beyond her power to obtain.

If illustrations of the woman's power are needed, they should be sought in the 'spiritualism,' the 'clairvoyants,' and the 'mediums,' of the present day. The proper meaning of the term 'necromancer' is 'one who interrogates the dead.' Some writers think that Samuel suddenly appeared before the woman had time even to begin any of her rites.

*Kitto* tells us that at one time he thought the king did not see the shade, or hear the voice; but only communicated through the woman; closer attention to the narrative had convinced him that Samuel had directly to do with Saul.

*Ewald* represents the more vague view of the incident, which would gladly relieve the story of all miraculous features. He says: 'Saul's act is condemned beforehand by the narrator as running counter to the religion of Jahveh; but it is equally certain that the narrator means that what Saul heard was really the angry spirit-voice of Samuel, and not mere deceptive words from the witch. He thus

condemns this mode of seeking an oracle as impious, but does not deny that the dead, or at least a spirit like Samuel's, could speak after death.' The tone of these remarks leads us to feel that *Ewald* would like to believe that the voice heard was really the voice of Saul's aroused *conscience*, using language remembered as employed by Samuel in the denunciations of the past. And for such a view very much might be urged.

*Jamieson* expresses the diversified views taken of the incident succinctly: 'The story has led to much discussion whether there was a real appearance of Samuel or not. On the one hand, the woman's profession, which was forbidden by the divine law, the refusal of God to answer Saul by any divinely-constituted means, the well-known age, figure, and dress of Samuel, which she could easily represent herself, or by an accomplice—his apparition being evidently at some distance, being muffled, and not actually seen by Saul—and the vagueness of the information given, which might have been reached by natural conjecture, have led many to think that it was a case of mere deception. On the other hand, many eminent writers (considering that the apparition came before her arts were put in practice; that she herself was surprised and alarmed; that the predictions of Saul's own death and the defeat of his forces were confidently made) are of opinion that Samuel really appeared.'

The chief authorities for the view that there was an actual presence of Samuel are: Heb. and Sept. Ver.; Josephus; Jewish expositors; Justin Martyr, Origen, Hippolytus, Ambrose, and Augustine; Waterland, Kitto, Gerlach, Delitzsch, and Keil. The authorities for the view that there was only a spectral illusion are: Tertullian, Luther, Cavin, Bishop Hall, Bishop Patrick, and Matthew Henry.

## The Fall of Jericho.

JOSHUA vi. 20: 'And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.'

**Question.**—*Are there any natural forces which we may think likely to have been used by God in the overthrow of this city?*

**Answer.**—It is remarkable that the Bible narrative should give so few details. We have the picturesque description of the eye-witness, not the precise and elaborate account of a scientific man. There is no attempt made to trace the agencies that were divinely employed; the writer satisfies himself with a firm and clear declaration of the Divine operation.

The modern mind cannot be satisfied with a statement of bare fact about anything. It persists in inquiring *how* the thing came about, and *why* it came to pass. We feel that we do not *know* a thing until we know the *cause* of it, and the *reason* for it. But in the case of Bible events and incidents we can never get beyond the possible, or perhaps the probable causes, and all inquiries into the antecedents of miraculous incidents must be made in a modest and hesitating spirit, because the data for an absolute decision cannot possibly be recovered.

The gravest difficulty in the account of Jericho lies in the mental picture which has been created by the expression, 'the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him.' This usually suggests a circular city with a wall all round it, which in a moment fell inwards, and lay like a pavement, over which the soldiers marched to possess the city.

It is only necessary to state the popular impression thus plainly in order to indicate its unsuitability, as a realization of the facts that are narrated. Poetical descriptions must not be treated in such a prosaic way. The Hebrew does not say that the wall fell down *flat*, but that it fell "*in its place*," or "*under it*," which equally expresses a general tumbling down. All that was necessary was the opening of wide breaches, of which the soldiers could take instant advantage; and this would be accomplished by an earthquake. It should further be noticed that Rahab's house was upon the town-wall, so that she could let down the spies into the open country; but as her house did not fall, it is plain that the part of the wall *by her house* could not have fallen.

The district is one much subject to earthquakes, and one may be assumed to have occurred at this moment, the force of which told upon the walls in such a manner that the Israelite soldiers could, from several directions at once, scramble over the débris, resist the frightened soldiers of Jericho, and speedily crush all opposition. Such an explanation meets all the necessities of the case, and, for many minds, will give worthier and more impressive views of the Divine interventions and overrulings, than can come to them by exaggerated representations, which seem more like fables or legends than sober history. God's use and control of the forces He has Himself appointed is more wonderful than any mere working of new wonders, which seem to suit better the Joves of heathenism than the Jehovah of the Bible, who created all things in infinite wisdom, and in foreknowledge of all their possible uses. God's free power over everything He has created, so that all things shall 'serve

His might,' seems to us a conception of God that fills us with reverence, and makes possible an intelligent—and not a mere superstitious—trust.

The explanations offered of the agency of this miracle have taken a threefold character. *Paulus* suggested an undermining of the walls; *Jahn*, an earthquake; and *Ewald*, a sudden assault.

Mr. W. H. Groser, in his work on *Joshua and his Successors*, shows how the intelligent and thoughtful reader ought to understand the poetical Bible description. He says: 'The mighty fortress was shaken to its foundations, the wall 'falling under itself,' and laying open the famed stronghold as though it had been one of the villages of the plain. Before the defenders could recover from the shock the invaders crossed the crumbling ruins on every side, and in accordance with the Divine command, put every living creature to the sword.'

*Dean Stanley* says: 'It may be that the means were found in the resources of the natural agencies of earthquake or volcanic convulsion, which mark the whole of the Jordan Valley, from Gennesareth down to the Dead Sea, and which are perpetually recurring in its course, not only during the sacred history, but to our own time. If so, we have a remarkable illustration and confirmation of the narrative, the more so, because the secondary causes of this phenomenon must have been to the sacred historians themselves unknown.'

*Van Lennep* remarks that 'Western Asia has suffered much from earthquakes from time immemorial, although only one volcano exists in its neighbourhood. This is Santorino, whose last great eruption is described by Strabo, since which period it has shown no sign of life till quite lately. The volcanoes of Katakekaumene (a part of Lydia) have long been extinct. But many cities, once prosperous and renowned, have in a moment's time been utterly destroyed by earthquakes, and many of their inhabitants buried under the ruins; chief among these were Antioch, Sardis, and Nicomedia. Constantinople has also suffered severely from the same cause, and the church of St. Sophia was levelled with the ground, but was afterwards rebuilt with greater splendour than before, by the Emperor Justinian (A.D. 548). It was, perhaps, by such an agency that the walls of Jericho were miraculously overthrown at the sounding of the trumpets of the Israelites.'

*Dr. C. Geikie* only ventures timidly to state the fact that an earthquake has been suggested as the agency. He says: 'That the walls should give way, and open a wide breach, after the seven circuits of the seventh day, must have raised only one thought in the bosom of

all Israel—that the victory was not theirs but God's. It is not even hinted that one of the earthquakes, so common in that region, happened at the time, though such a coincidence has been imagined.

## God's Sign to Ahaz.

ISAIAH vii. 14 : 'Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign ; behold, virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that some supernatural event was to happen, or did the sign lie in the fact of what was about to happen being foretold ?*

**Answer.**—A 'sign' is not necessarily a 'miracle,' nor necessarily even a 'prophecy.' It is simply a sensible pledge of the truth of something else, whether present, past, or future. Sometimes it took form as a miracle, sometimes as a prophecy, but sometimes only as a symbol, and especially as a symbolical name or action. In the case of Ahaz, the sign was offered as a proof of Isaiah's Divine legation, which Ahaz seemed to doubt.

The explanation of this particular sign by *J. A. Alexander* is as follows : 'The king having refused to ask a sign, the prophet gives him one, by renewing the promise of deliverance (ver. 8, 9), and connecting it with the birth of a child, whose significant name is made a symbol of the Divine interposition, and his progress a measure of the subsequent events. Instead of saying that God would be present with them to deliver them, he says the child shall be called Immanuel (God with us) ; instead of mentioning a term of years, he says, before the child is able to distinguish good from evil ; instead of saying that until that time the land shall lie waste, he represents the child as eating curds and honey, spontaneous products, here put in opposition to the fruits of cultivation. At the same time, the form of expression is descriptive. Instead of saying that the child shall experience all this, he represents its birth and infancy as actually passing in his sight ; he sees the child brought forth and named Immanuel ; he sees the child eating curds and honey till a certain age. But very different opinions are held as to the child here alluded to. Some think it must be a child about to be born, in the course of nature, to the prophet himself. Others think that two distinct births are referred to, one that of Shear Jashub, the prophet's son, and the other Christ, the Virgin's Son. Yet others see only a prophetic reference to the birth of Messiah.' Alexander's conclusion is that, 'While some diversity of judgment ought to be expected and

allowed, in relation to the secondary question (of the child of the period that is referred to), there is no ground, grammatical, historical, or logical, for doubt as to the main point, that the Church in all ages has been right in regarding this passage as a signal and explicit prediction of the miraculous conception and nativity of Jesus Christ.'

It has been remarked that 'the method of giving a sign by predicting something in the near future as a pledge for predictions that belong to a more remote time is specially characteristic of Isaiah.'

With the general idea, that an undertone of reference to the person, times, and work of Messiah runs through the whole prophetic Scriptures, we can accept *Dean Plumptre's* suggestions as to the first and natural explanation of the sign. And a clear understanding of its immediate purpose is essential to an advance towards the deeper allusions or prophecies that may be embodied in it. The Dean says: 'We may deal with this passage as though the Gospel of St. Matthew had never been written, as though the facts which it records had no place in the history of mankind. From this point of view we get what seems at first a comparatively simple exposition. The prophet offers a sign to the faithless king, and the sign is this: he points to some young bride in either sense of that word, and says that she shall conceive and bare a son. The fulfilment of that prediction in a matter which lay outside the range of human knowledge was to be the sign for Ahaz and his court, and she should give that son a name which would rebuke the faithlessness of the king. Immanuel, "God with us," would be a *nomen et omen*, witnessing, not of an incarnate deity, but of his living and abiding presence. Who was the mother of the child on this theory we have no *data* for deciding. The natural birth of the child Immanuel was, to the prophet and his generation, a pledge and earnest of the abiding presence of God with His people.'

## NEW TESTAMENT.

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‘We have no right to insert miracles in the Gospel records.’—*Dean Plumptre.*

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTES.

*I.—The Miracles of our Lord and His Apostles considered as Evidences of Christianity.*

IT is a marked feature of modern religious thought that the evidence of miracles is undervalued. For those who lived in our Lord's time, they were of primary importance, because Christ had not been long enough among them to make due moral impression upon them. To those who have received direct impressions from Christ Himself, miracles become quite simple, secondary, and comparatively unimportant things. The Christ is felt to be greater than any ‘works’ He did, any ‘wonders’ He wrought. In a critical age, such as ours is, no reported miracles can be accepted as proofs, because the evidence for the miracle itself is not satisfactory to the critical mind, and the wonder said to be wrought was not submitted to scientific tests.

Evidence by miracle can only be effective for ages of over-faith, or of lost faith. In simple childlike, we had almost said superstitious, times, supernatural working is at once accepted as evidence of Divine presence and power. Untrained minds, like child-minds, are over-ready to accept the mysterious. And when faith in the unseen and eternal has been crushed down by scepticism, formalism, and worldliness, then indications of direct Divine action, taking miraculous form, may make an awakening impression; but in the first case moral susceptibility has not developed, and in the latter case moral susceptibility has been destroyed. This is the position we may take—if a man is open to the moral influence of Christ Himself, he will be comparatively indifferent to any evidence which may be afforded by Christ's wonder-working. Christ is His own evidence.

This position may be restated in the language of other writers. It is a point of importance in view of the difficulty felt by many

thoughtful minds in accepting Christianity on what is called unverified and unexplained miracle.

*Dr. Angus* says : 'Men believed, *in the first age at least*, because Divine works or miracles (facts, that is, which could not have taken place from natural causes or without superhuman aid) attested the truth of the message. To these works our Lord repeatedly appealed, as works which none other man did, and as an evidence of His mission.'

*Archbishop Trench* says : 'The fact that the kingdom of lies has its wonders no less than the kingdom of truth, would be alone sufficient to convince us that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and simply in proof of the doctrine which the worker of them proclaims. *Miracle only claims the right to be listened to*—the doctrine must commend itself to the conscience as *good*, only then can a miracle seal it as *Divine*. The first appeal is from the doctrine to the conscience, the moral nature in man. Miracles are to be the credentials for the bearer of the good word. When the mind and conscience witness against the doctrine, not all the miracles in the world have a right to demand submission to the word which they seal. The safeguard from fatal errors lies altogether in men's moral and spiritual, and not at all in their intellectual, condition.'

*Dr. Arnold* says : 'The substance of a revelation is the most essential part of its evidence ; and miracles wrought in favour of what was foolish or wicked would only prove Manicheism.' 'The character of any supernatural power can only be judged by the moral character of the statements it sanctions.'

*Renan* states the point more intensely than we can approve, but his words indicate the extreme modern position on the present evidential value of miracles : 'Two means of proof—miracles and the accomplishment of prophecy—could alone, — the opinion of the contemporaries of Jesus, establish a supernatural mission. Many circumstances seem to indicate that Jesus only became a *thaumaturgus* (wonder, or miracle-worker), late in life, and against His inclination. If the thaumaturgus had effaced in Jesus the moralist and religious reformer, there would have proceeded from Him a school of theurgy, and not Christianity. The greatest miracle would have been Christ's refusal to perform any ; never would the laws of history and popular psychology have suffered so great a derogation. The miracles of Jesus were a violence done to Him by His age, a concession forced from Him by a passing necessity.'

*Dr. Horace Bushnell* says : 'To the contemporaries of Jesus he might well enough be approved of God, by miracles and signs ; for,

being themselves eye-witnesses, they could easily be sure of the facts. But to those who saw them not, to us who have only heard of them by report of history, they can never be cited as proofs; because the main thing to settle is the verity of the facts themselves. The Gospel history, instead of being attested to us by the miracles, has them rather as a heavy burden resting on its own credibility.'

*Baden Powell* says: 'The evidential force of miracles is wholly relative to the apprehension of the parties addressed. An alleged miracle can only be regarded in one of two ways: (1) abstractedly, as a physical event, and therefore to be investigated by reason and physical evidence, and referred to physical causes, possibly to known causes; but at all events to some higher cause or law, if at present unknown: it then ceases to be supernatural, yet still it might be appealed to in support of religious truth, especially as referring to the state of knowledge and apprehensions of the parties addressed in past ages. Or (2) as connected with religious doctrine, regarded in a sacred light, asserted on the authority of inspiration. In this case it ceases to be capable of investigation by reason, or to own its dominion; it is accepted on religious grounds, and can appeal only to the principle and influence of faith.'

The author of *Ecce Homo* says: 'Some may think that in asserting miracles to have been actually wrought by Christ, we go beyond the evidence, perhaps beyond what any possible evidence is able to sustain. This at least will be admitted, that Christ professed to work miracles, and was believed by His followers really to work them. The reality of the miracles depends in a great degree on the opinion we form of Christ's veracity, and this opinion must arise from the careful examination of His life. By itself supernatural power would not have procured for Christ the kind of ascendancy he wanted, but exactly that ascendancy which He so decidedly rejected. Supernatural power was not invariably connected in the minds of the ancients with God and goodness; it was supposed to be the gift of evil spirits as well as good; it was regarded with horror in as many cases as with reverence.'

*J. Stalker*, in his very suggestive *Life of Jesus Christ*, says: 'It was a stupendous claim which He made on the faith of men when He announced Himself as the Messiah, and it would have been unreasonable to expect it to be conceded by a nation accustomed to miracles as the signs of a Divine mission, if He had wrought none.'

Miracles, then, are evidences of Christianity *to us* mainly because they were, when wrought, adequate evidences to those for whom

they were wrought. Our fuller evidence of a *moral* character properly puts evidence from miracle in the background.

## II.—*Miracles of our Lord considered as Illustrations of His Mission.*

They were mainly symbols of His spiritual and saving work, and we use them chiefly for their illustrative value. In this direction they are found to be an inexhaustible storehouse for all Christian teachers.

*Dr. George Macdonald* has put new meaning into the miracles of Christ, by studying them from this point of view. The following passage explains his position: 'He has come, the Word of God, that we may know God; every word of His then, as needful to the knowing of Himself, is needful to the knowing of God. . . . It is but natural to expect that the deeds of the great Messenger should be just the works of the Father done in little. If He came to reveal His Father in miniature, as it were (for in these unspeakable things we can but use figures, and the homeliest may be the holiest), to tone down His great voice, which, too loud for men to hear it aright, could but sound to them as an inarticulate thundering, into such a still small voice as might enter their human ears in welcome human speech; then the works that His Father does so widely, so grandly, that they transcend the vision of men, the Son must do briefly and sharply before their very eyes. This, I think, is the true nature of the miracles; an epitome of God's processes in nature beheld in immediate connection with their source—a source as yet lost to the eyes, and too often to the hearts of men in the far-receding gradations of continuous law. That men might see the will of God at work, Jesus did the works of the Father thus . . . . The miracles are surely less than those mighty goings on of nature with God beheld at their heart. In the name of Him who delighted to say, "My Father is greater than I," I will say that His miracles in bread and wine were far less grand and less beautiful than the works of the Father they represented, in making the corn to grow in the valleys, and the grapes to drink the sunlight on the hillsides of the world, with all their infinitudes of tender gradation and delicate mystery of birth. But the Son of the Father be praised, who as it were, condensed these mysteries before us, and let us see the precious gifts coming at once from gracious hands—hands that love could kiss and nails could wound.' 'What in the hands of the Father are the mighty motions, and progresses, and conquests of life, in the hands of the Son are miracles.'

A more familiar way of setting forth the illustrative value of Christ's

miracles is given by *Stalker*: 'You have only to consider the miracles for a moment to see that they were, as a whole, triumphs over the misery of the world. Mankind is the prey of a thousand evils, and even the frame of external nature bears the mark of some past catastrophe. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." This huge mass of physical evil in the lot of mankind is the effect of sin. Not that every disease and misfortune can be traced to special sin, although some of them can. The consequences of past sin are distributed in detail over the whole race. But yet the misery of the world is the shadow of its sin. Material and moral evil being thus intimately related, mutually illustrate each other. When He healed bodily blindness, it was a type of the healing of the inner eye; when He raised the dead, He meant to suggest that He was the Resurrection and the Life in the spiritual world as well; when He cleansed the leper, His triumph spoke of another over the leprosy of sin; when He multiplied the loaves, He followed the miracle with a discourse on the Bread of life; when He stilled the storm, it was an assurance that He could speak peace to the troubled conscience.'

### III.—*On the Manifestation of Miraculous Power at Special Times.*

'The Scriptures record three eras signalized by displays of the supernatural; which three periods stand associated respectively with three great names—Moses, Elijah, and the Lord Jesus Christ. The performance of wonders is related of other times; but only these deserve to be called the ages of miracles.

'The reasons for the distinction must be sought in peculiarity of circumstance, and in special Providential ends requiring extraordinary measures for their accomplishment. In the first instance, a people, long sunk in ignorance and degradation, were to be liberated from serfdom, trained in virtue, and made keepers of the oracles of God. The second period was that of a much-needed reformation in the kingdom of Israel; when a desperate effort was put forth to recall the Ten Tribes from idolatrous apostasy, that it might not involve them in final rejection and ruin. The third was the age of Messiah's coming; when the revealed religion reached its full development, and was offered to all mankind.

'These were crises of unparalleled importance. If it ever comported with the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme, for His power to be exceptionally seen on the theatre of human affairs, it would be fitting for the manifestation to appear at such pregnant times.

‘This is eminently true of the first and third of the specified eras—those momentous starting-points in the history of man! On looking back over the page of history, we meet with no other junctures that called so imperatively for Divine interposition, in order that the minds of men might be impressed with unusual tokens of God’s presence and will. If these periods had been passed by, none could have laid claim to the sublime distinction. Every one of the three *clusters of signs* stands when and where it was most to be expected.

‘These groups of miracles support one another. The first leads the way to those which follow, and the last helps us to believe the preceding. The Christian wonders have the advantage of being the most accessible to inquiry, because the nearest to our own day, and within the range of collateral history. And when the credentials of the latest satisfy, the way is prepared for the reception of the more remote. As the members of a series, Scripture signs are so far mutually confirmatory, that persons who feel certified of any will have little difficulty in accepting the rest. If the authenticity of our Lord’s works is proved, they go a great way towards establishing the credit of all the extraordinary things recorded in the Old Testament.’—*Prof. W. Griffiths, M.A.*

*Trench*, comparing our Lord’s with the earlier miracles, says: ‘The works of our Lord, though they bear not on their front the imposing character which did those of old, yet contain higher and deeper truths. They are eminently miracles of the Incarnation of the Son of God who had taken our flesh, and taking, would heal it. They have predominantly a relation to man’s body and his spirit. Miracles of nature assume now altogether a subordinate place; they still survive, even as we could have ill afforded wholly to have lost them; for this region of nature must still be claimed as part of Christ’s dominion, though not its chiefest or its noblest province. Man, and not nature, is now the main subject of these mighty powers; and thus it comes to pass that, with less of outward pomp, less to startle and amaze, the new have a yet deeper inward significance than the old.’

## The Wonderful Birth.

LUKE i. 38: 'And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'

**Difficulty.**—*If our Lord came into the world in such a supernatural manner, there must be some limitations on our conception of Him, as a real fellow-man.*

**Explanation.**—It is not easy to treat this profound and delicate subject with a becoming reticence; and the doctrinal points connected with the Incarnation will be considered elsewhere. We limit ourselves here to one point. Previous manifestations of God to men had taken the temporary form and appearance of men, and we call them 'angel manifestations.' They were cases of God revealing His mind to His servants through an unreal human appearance, which, however, made due impressions on man's senses; and these senses of sight, hearing, and even touch, became the media of communication with God.

These were but foreshadowings of, and preparations for, a manifestation of God to man in an actual, complete human life of flesh, and blood, and relations. God proposed to show men *in a man* the kind of man He planned at first. He made man in His image in order that man's life might become His shrine. Adam, in the name of his race, filled the throne with *self-will*. Now God would send forth into the world a man, who should go about among his fellow-men as the shrine of God; in Him God dwelt and ruled.

To make due impression on us, this Man must be felt to be *really one of us*. That impression could only be produced in one way. He must be born of a woman as we are born. It is the mother who gives the bodily form to the new life. The origination of the life is always the work of God. In this new life was to be found a new starting of the race, and so, as the first Adam came forth in his maturity by the direct creation of God, the second Adam came forth under ordinary womanly conditions, by an act of Divine origination. The true humanity of Jesus is sealed for us in this, that He was born under the ordinary earthly conditions, or, as Scripture expresses it, 'born of a woman.'

It may suffice to confirm our point by a restatement of it in the language of *Pressensé*, which, though similar to that of Neander and others, will be somewhat clearer to the general reader: 'He who is to be the head of a new race which is to be at once Divine and human—the realization, that is to say, of its primitive type—cannot

be simply one of the links of the long chain of natural generations, all tainted with the evil which has, as it were, become incorporated in a fallen race. It is impossible that He should save humanity, if He has to say with David, "I was conceived in sin." We must make, as it were, a new beginning; and the second Adam cannot destroy the work of the first, except on condition that He be not of his descent. He must be born of a woman, and assume a truly human nature; but it is equally essential that the active cause of His earthly being be not a corrupt humanity, but the Divine and creative principle. As to explanation of this mystery, we can offer none but such as is contained in the words, "With God nothing is impossible;" this will suffice for every believer in the Omnipotent mercy, which is the one foundation of the supernatural.'

### Money in a Fish.

MATTHEW xvii. 27: 'But, lest we cause them to stumble, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a shekel: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*This appears to be opposed to our Lord's rule of using His miraculous powers only for ends of service to others, never merely to meet His own wants, or to preserve Himself from danger.*

**Explanation.**—Ends of service to others must not be limited to *physical* blessings; it must include *moral* blessings. Miracles may, within the line of Christ's rule, be used for moral teaching, for the religious education of one person, or of money. Several of our Lord's most striking miracles are explicable only in view of the educational ends sought by them. This particular miracle is relative to Peter, and is a part of our Lord's service to him. Money for the purpose of taxation could have been procured from some other and ordinary source; but our Lord saw an opportunity of impressing the deeper truth concerning Himself upon this leading disciple, and therefore made him the agent in proving a miracle of foreknowledge. We are willing to admit that this case is a most unusual one, and that there is not another of our Lord's *works* with which it can properly be compared; but the end sought by it is of sufficient importance to justify it, and to show it to be in essential harmony with our Lord's principle in the use of miraculous power.

*Trench* brings out the educational relation of the miracle to Peter with much force. On being asked whether his Master pays the ordinary Jewish tax of a half-shekel, 'Peter at once replies in the

affirmative. Zealous for his Lord's honour, and confident that His piety would make Him prompt in whatever God's ordinance required, he pledges Him without hesitation to the payment. Yet was he overhasty in this. There was on his part a failing here to recognise the higher dignity of his Lord ; it was not in this spirit that he had exclaimed a little while before, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." For the time, at least, he had lost sight of his Lord's true position and prerogative, that He was a Son over His own house, and not a servant in another's ; the Head of the theocracy, not one of its subordinate members, so that it was *to* Him in His Father that offerings were to be made, not *from* Him to be received. This last had been out of all reason ; for He who was to be a ransom for all other souls could not properly give a ransom for His own. It was not for Him who was "greater than the temple," and Himself the true temple (John ii. 21.), identical with it according to its spiritual significance, and in whom the Shekinah glory dwelt, to pay dues for the support of that other temple built with hands, which was now fast losing its significance, since in His flesh the true tabernacle was set up, which the Lord had pitched and not man. It is then for the purpose of bringing back Peter, and with him the other disciples, to the true recognition of Himself, from which they had in part fallen, that the Lord puts to him the question which follows. And for the same reason, being engaged through Peter's hasty imprudence, to the rendering of the didrachm, which now He could scarcely recede from, He yet does it in the remarkable way of this present miracle—a miracle which should testify that all things served Him, from the greatest to the least, even to the fishes that walked through the paths of the sea—that He was Lord over nature, and, having nothing, yet in His Father's care for Him, was truly possessed of all things. For here, as so often in the life of our Lord, the depth of His poverty and humiliation is lighted up by a gleam of His glory ; while, by the manner of the payment, He re-asserted the true dignity of His person, which else by the payment itself was in danger of being obscured, and compromised in the eyes of some. The miracle, then, was to supply a real need—slight, indeed, as an outward need, for the money could assuredly have been in some other and more ordinary way procured ; but *as an inner need, most real.*'

## Early Church Miracles.

MARK xvi. 17, 18: 'And these signs shall follow them that believe: in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Questions.**—*Are we to think of these powers, or gifts, as distributed among the disciples, or as the endowment of each and all of the disciples; and are we right in assuming that miraculous powers were limited to the Apostolic age?*

**Answer.**—Our Lord's intention in making this assurance is best understood by examining the way in which His promise was fulfilled. St. Paul clearly teaches that there was a distribution of gifts. Writing to the Corinthians (ch. xii. 4-11.), the Apostle speaks of "diversities of gifts," wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers tongues. interpretation of tongues; and he adds, 'All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.' From this we gather that our Lord's promise was fulfilled in the Church as a whole, but each individual member had his own special gift.

The answer to the second question depends on the view we may take of the necessity for permanent outward signs of superhuman power as evidences of Christianity. Miracles must in their very nature be temporary. As soon as the things which we call miracles become permanent and regular, they come into the natural order, and cease to be surprises. We are familiar with them, and they no longer bear testimony to us of Divine interferences and adjustments. It may also be urged, that when miracles have done their precise work, they have accredited messengers, and then they leave us to listen to the messengers, feel their personal influence, and receive the truth they have to teach.

But no one can safely venture to say that miracles may not again be wrought, and again be used as signs and evidences. That must depend on man's mental and moral conditions in any particular age. We can quite conceive of the influence of formality on the one hand, and scepticism on the other, producing such a spiritual—or rather unspiritual—condition, that again, in appropriate ways, the direct intervention of God, by miraculous workings, may be necessary. Such signs will surely be given whenever such signs are needed; and of the need only the great Searcher Himself can fitly judge.

*Dr. Bushnell* argues thus: 'It does not follow that, if the canon of Scripture is closed up, there is no longer any use or place for

miracles and spiritual gifts. That is a conclusion taken by a mere act of judgment, when plainly no judgment of man is able to penetrate the secrets and grasp the economic reasons of God's empire, with sufficient insight to affirm anything on a subject so deep and difficult. There may certainly be reasons for such miracles and gifts of the Spirit, apart from any authentication of new books of Scripture. Indeed, they might possibly be wanted even the more, to break up the monotony likely to follow, when revelations have ceased and the word of Scripture is for ever closed up; wanted possibly to lift the Church out of the abysses of a mere second-hand religion, keeping it alive and open to the realities of God's immediate visitation.

### Driving out of Devils.

MARK i. 34: 'And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand this devil-possession as a form of suffering peculiar to the time of Christ, or was it only a term under which known and common forms of disease were classified?*

**Answer.**—It is remarkable that no Evangelist alludes to devil-possession as in any way fresh or astonishing. They treat it as a very sad, but very common form of human suffering; and unless we have satisfied ourselves that the Jewish notions about evil spirits are substantially true, we cannot find more in this so-called devil-possession than an attempt to explain cases of disease which were obscure then, and are obscure still.

Evidently the name is applied to essentially different cases of suffering. Some are plain cases of severe epilepsy; others are as plainly cases of hysteria; yet others of ordinary mania or melancholia. But it must be admitted, that the most important instances cannot be regarded as ordinary cases of brain or nerve disease. There is no ground for assuming any special activity of evil spirits in Christ's day; and probably a proper understanding of the class of diseases of which *delirium tremens* may be taken as the type, would enable us to explain the special features of the most perplexing cases.

In *delirium tremens* we have this peculiarity—the craving for drink has becoming a separate and master power, controlling the man's will: so that in some things the man may be ordering his life, and in other things the drink-spirit is ordering his life. The man is possessed with an evil spirit—the demon of drink. Sometimes the man speaks; at other times the demon-spirit masters the man, and speaks through him; and this is one of the features of the devil-possession narrated

in the Gospels ; probably it is the one which occasions most difficulty, and gives most support to the notion of an indwelling of an individual and personal evil spirit.

Now, the case of *delirium tremens* is only an intense case of *habit*. All habits if unresisted tend to become masterful, they grow to be 'second selves'; they compel us to do what we would not ; they are a sort of spirit in us, a second will controlling, and even crushing our wills. It is a great law for our life that if we do not resist inclination and evil when we may, we shall not be able to do so when we would.

What applies generally to bodily and mental habits, applies in a very special way to habits in which the *passions* are concerned. There is a disease of indulged sensuality just answering to *delirium tremens*, which may also truly be regarded as a devil-possession : and some of the cases with which our Lord dealt—notably the case of the man at Gadara—were of this class.

It is more helpful to us to see that our Lord bore saving relations to the precise conditions in which men are actually found, and delivered men from the precise bondages in which they were enslaved, than to imagine men suffering from some unknown forms of disease or possession, sent for a time, that Christ's power may gain extraordinary illustration. Our conviction that our Lord can help and deliver *us* lies just in this, that we feel sure He dealt—while He was here—with the sorrows, woes, and slaveries that were "common to men" in every age ; however true it may be that they take on intenser forms in some conditions of social life than in others.

*Trench* gives a note from a medical work, by *Bright and Addison*, which clearly recognises a *double consciousness* as a symptom of *delirium tremens*. 'In his most tranquil and collected moments he is not to be trusted ; for the transition from that state to the greatest violence is instantaneous : he is often recalled by a word to an apparent state of reason, but as quickly his false impressions return ; there is sometimes evidence, at the time, of a state of double consciousness, a condition of mind which is sometimes remembered by the patient when the paroxysm is over.'

If we take, then, the typical instances of the devil-possession as cases of weakened and mastered personal will, we shall get more impressive views of the Divine power of our Lord, whose supreme work in man is the regeneration and adequate strengthening of the human will. We shall see His work of grace, in us all, effectively illustrated in His restoring the will-power of these demoniacs, and putting them in their right mind.

A due consideration of this subject would require a treatise, and we can only suggest the one explanation which seems to us every way reasonable and probable. It may, however, be wise to add a few remarks on the Jewish way of regarding evil, and especially evil taking obscure forms, as the action of demons. 'All mental aberration, all sudden sickness, all melancholy tendencies, all unexpected obstacles, were, and in the East still are, regarded as due to the direct influence of demons (devils). These demons they believed to be the spirits of the wicked. That they regarded as demoniacal possession what we regard as epilepsy and mania is certain.'

—*Farrar.*

*Dr. Edersheim* does not take the view which we have suggested, but the following striking passage gives our explanation valuable philosophical support. (See *Life of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i., p. 608.) 'We repeat, that this must be kept in view as characteristic of the demonized, that they were incapable of separating their own consciousness and ideas from the influence of the demon, their own identity being merged, and to that extent lost, in that of their tormentors. In this respect the demonized state was also kindred to madness. Self-consciousness, or rather what may be termed individualism, *i.e.*, the consciousness of separate and independent individuality, and with it the power of self-origination in matters mental and moral (which some might term an aspect of free volition), distinguish the human soul from the mere animal spirit. But in maniacal disease this power is an abeyance, or temporarily lost through physical causes, such as disease of the brain as the medium of communication between the mind and the world of sense; disease of the nervous system, through which ordinarily impressions are conveyed to and from the *sensorium*; or disease of both brain and nervous system, when previously existing impressions on the brain (in memory, and hence possibly imagination) may be excited without corresponding outward causes. If in such case the absolute power of self-origination and self-action is lost to the mind, *habits of sin and vice* (or moral disease) may have an analogous effect as regards moral freedom—the power of moral self-origination and action. In the demonized state the two appear combined, the cause being neither disease or vice, but the presence of a superior power of evil.' In this last assumption we do not follow *Dr. Edersheim*. Disease and vice sufficiently account for all the phenomena of so-called 'demonism,' on *Dr. Edersheim's* own lines; and there is no reason why we should call in to our aid vague and mysterious conceptions of actual possessing demons.

One grave difficulty, however, is our Lord's using language concerning these sufferers which is thus shown not to be strictly accurate. He spoke of 'spirits' possessing the men; but did He know that they were cases of disease or indulged habit? This difficulty really rests on our notion that Jesus was omniscient *in the sphere of His earthly life*. As *God*, He was omniscient; but the glory of the Incarnation is, that He limited Himself to the thought-sphere, word-sphere, and life-sphere, not only of a man, but also of a Jew, and of a Jew born in that particular age. As man, he spoke of a common disease of the time in the language commonly used about it. It was no part of our Lord's earthly mission to correct the mistakes of common speech, or the misconception of medical, or any other, science. He condescended to accept the thought and language limitations of His age.

### Christ's Invisibility.

LUKE iv. 30: 'But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.'

JOHN viii. 59: 'They took up stones therefore to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple' (*Rev. Ver.*).

JOHN x. 39: 'They sought again to take Him: and He went forth out of their hand' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Question.**—*Are we to understand the Evangelists to mean that, on these occasions, our Lord wrought a miracle to ensure His own safety, and made Himself invisible to those who would seize Him?*

**Answer.**—No such thing is directly stated in either instance. Making Himself invisible is the ready explanation of what occurred which *men have given*; so we need not hesitate to inquire whether any better account of the incidents can be suggested. The Word of God simply says that our Lord passed through the crowd and excitement uninjured; and by comparing the Revised Version, in the two latter cases, with the Received Version, it will be seen that some of the difficulty attaches to the earlier and more imperfect translation.

Seeking analogies from other parts of Scripture, we are reminding of the mental confusion, or blindness, of the Sodomites, who wearied themselves to find the door; and the delusion of the Syrians who came to seize Elisha, and were led by him into Samaria.

The instance recorded by John are simply cases of prudence and skill in managing. There is nothing of the miraculous suggested in them: the instance given by Luke is more suggestive of special putting forth of Divine power.

It is necessary, however, to keep in mind that it was a fixed principle with our Lord, one which expressed His loyalty to God,

that he would not use His miraculous gifts or powers for His own safety, or His own service; and we therefore require thoroughly sufficient proofs of any particular case which appears to be opposed to His established principle of action. If, on this occasion at Nazareth, our Lord saved Himself by a miracle, evidence of the miracle should be given, and it should be shown that only a miraculous interpretation will meet the difficulty of the case.

If the people from the synagogue were unitedly set on the seizure of Jesus, only some putting forth of His supreme power could have saved Him. But if the people from the synagogue were quarrelling and struggling among themselves, some opposing Christ and some standing up for Him, our Lord might easily, and in quite a natural way, secure His escape. We will seek the help of good Bible writers in our endeavour to form a correct view of the incident.

*Farrar* says: 'There is no need to suppose an actual miracle; still less to imagine a secret and sudden escape into the narrow and tortuous lanes of the town. Perhaps His silence, perhaps the calm nobleness of His bearing, perhaps the dauntless innocence of His gaze overawed them. Apart from anything supernatural, there seems to have been in the presence of Jesus a spell of mystery and of majesty which even His most ruthless and hardened enemies acknowledged, and before which they involuntarily bowed. It was to this that He owed His escape when the maddened Jews in the Temple took up stones to stone Him; it was this that made the bold and bigoted officers of the Sanhedrim unable to arrest Him as He taught in public during the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem; it was this that made the armed band of His enemies, at His mere look, fall before Him to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane. Suddenly, quietly, He asserted His freedom, waived aside His captors, and overawing them by His simple glance, passed through their midst unharmed. Similar events have occurred in history, and continue still to occur. There is something in defenceless and yet dauntless dignity that calms even the fury of a mob. "They stood—stopped—inquired—were ashamed—fled—separated."'

*Farrar* adds, in a footnote: 'Some of my readers may be aware of an instance in which a clergyman, still living, walked untouched through the very midst of a brutal and furious London mob, who had assembled for the express purpose of insulting and assaulting him. It was observed by more than one spectator, that if he had wavered for a single instant, or shown the slightest sign of fear and irresolution, he would in all probability have been struck down, and possibly have not escaped with his life.'

*Geikie* dismisses the matter in a sentence : ' His time was not yet come. A spell cast on the fierce mob, opened a way for Him, and He passed through and left the town unhurt.'

*Neander* says : ' The protecting hand of God alone saved Him from the death which threatened Him.'

*Olshausen* says : ' These words in themselves certainly do not indicate anything miraculous ; some fortunate accident might have made it possible for an individual to escape from the excited and irritated inhabitants of a whole city. But anyone who holds that nothing happens by accident, and that least of all this could be the case in the history of the Son of God, anyone, moreover, who inquires exegetically into the view of the writer, must be forced to confess the meaning here expressed to be this, Jesus departed through the midst of them without restraint or hindrance, insomuch as being the Mighty One, His Divine power held their limbs and senses bound. No one could take from Him His life, unless when He freely gave it.'

*Kitto* says : ' On the way He escaped out of their hands—whether by miracle or by the exercise of natural providence, aided by the presence of His disciples, is not recorded.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* says : ' It is not very clear whether we are to understand that any miraculous event took place. Some consider that He so impressed His enemies by the dignity of His appearance and manner, that they had not the courage to lay hold of Him or to stop Him. De Wette and Meyer consider that a miraculous occurrence is intended : the former, with ancient writers, generally understanding the Evangelist to mean, that the inherent miraculous power of Jesus paralyzed His enemies. This is, on the whole, the most probable explanation of the narrative.'

It may suffice to add the very satisfactory conclusion of *Dean Plumptre*. ' The words do not necessarily involve a directly supernatural deliverance, as though the multitude had been smitten with blindness, or our Lord had become invisible. We have no right to insert miracles in the Gospel records. Calmness, silence, the moral power of self-possessed righteousness, have in themselves a power, often proved, to baffle the fury of an angry mob.'

## Healing Agencies employed in Miracles.

JOHN ix. 6 : 'When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.'

**Difficulty.**—*As our Lord could heal with a word, and usually did so, there seems to be no reason for His carefully using healing agencies in this and some other cases.*

**Explanation.**—Every case illustrates the care with which our Lord adapted His methods so as to be most effective in the blessing of the sufferer. When the patient had his ordinary senses of sight and hearing, they brought him sufficient information, and due persuasion to the belief—or better, trust—which was the condition of Christ's healing. But when hearing or sight were lost, our Lord made up for the deficiency by *acting His persuasion*, so that feeling might do the work which hearing and sight could do in other cases. In this direction lies an adequate explanation of our Lord's using agencies in some cases and not in others.

The case connected with the above text is one of blindness; and the remedies are such as were usual for eye diseases at the time, but they were associated with a requirement—to wash at Siloam—which bore no known relation to eye disease, and at once suggested a special Divine power.

*Dr. Edersheim* says : 'If we ask ourselves why means were used in this instance, we can only suggest that it was partly for the sake of him who was to be healed, and partly for theirs who afterwards heard of it. For the blind man seems to have been ignorant of the character of his Healer, and it needed the use of some means to make him, so to speak, receptive. On the other hand, not only the use of means, but their inadequacy to the object, must have impressed all.'

*Farrar* contents himself with the general remark, 'We have no means of deciding in this, any more than in the parallel instances, why our Lord, who sometimes healed by a word, preferred at other times to adopt slow and more elaborate methods of giving effect to His supernatural power. In this matter He **never** revealed the principles of action which doubtless arose from His inner knowledge of the circumstances, and from His insight into the hearts of those on whom His cures were wrought.'

*Geikie* sees a connection between the employment of agencies in this case, and a testimony which Jesus desired to make respecting the Sabbath. He might have opened the eyes of the poor man by a word, but a great lesson was to be taught His enemies. He wished

to protest once more against the hypocritical strictness of the Rabbinical observance of the Sabbath, which so entirely destroyed the true significance of the holy day. He would show that it was in full accordance with the office of Messiah, not only Himself to do what the dominant party denounced as *work* on the Sabbath, but to require it also from him whom He cured.'

Professor Watkins (in *Ellicott's Commentary*) supports the explanation which we suggest above: 'Here it will be enough to observe that in each case (of the use of means) the loss of a channel of communication between the individual man and the outer world is compensated by some special means which may help to assure him of the presence of the true Healer, and may furnish a foundation for his faith and hope. The deaf man cannot hear the tones of a voice that tells of mercy and love, but the touch applied to the ear may in part convey the same gracious truths. The blind man cannot see the look of compassion which others can see; but the saliva or the clay applied to the eye, gives force to the word which is heard by the ear. In every case we should remember that the means is chiefly moral, preparing in the sufferer a mental condition which can receive the gift of healing, and that the physical gift is itself regarded as a stage in the spiritual education.'

## Forty Days' Fasting.

MATTHEW iv. 2: 'And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hungered.'

**Question.**—*Was this merely an unusual case of Eastern abstinence, or must we recognise direct miraculous support given to our Lord?*

**Answer.**—It is quite possible that the number forty is used in a general way for a long time, and is not intended to indicate precisely the length of the fasting time. Numbers, such as 'seven' and 'forty,' appear to have been used in a special way by the Jews. The narrative of the Temptation is satisfied by our understanding that the fasting continued a long time, sufficient to involve great bodily exhaustion, which, in an ordinary case, would involve a weakness of will to resist temptation.

We are not, however, anxious to press this point. Forty days' fasting is almost, but not quite, a human impossibility; but it is much more of an impossibility under the conditions of Western life, food, and habits, than it is in the more restful and the simpler East.

The Evangelists who record the fasting do not suggest anything miraculous about it, nor do they indicate that it needs either explanation or proof. It may, therefore, be understood that the fasting was naturally sustained—a highly strained, rapt, and ecstatic condition of mind and feeling, making our Lord for so long a time indifferent to food. It was a time of profound and absorbed meditation on His mission, and all it involved; and our Lord was, as we should say, 'carried away,' so as to be wholly indifferent to material things.

It is significant that Matthew says nothing of special help to endure the fasting, but tells of angels ministering to Him at the close of the scene, and when both the fasting and the temptation were over (ver. 11). Probably the ministering of the angels was such miraculous provision for His needs as was made for the wearied and despondent Elijah, when he fled into the deserts of Beersheba.

On the number 'forty' *Farrar* says: 'The number occurs again and again in Scripture, and always in connection with the facts of temptation or retribution. It is clearly a sacred and representative number, and independently of other associations, it was for forty days that Moses had staid on Sinai, and Elijah in the wilderness. In moments of intense excitement and overwhelming thought, the ordinary needs of the body seem to be modified, or even for a time superseded.'

*Dean Plumptre* says that 'prolonged fasts of nearly the same extent have been recorded in later times. The effect of such a fast on any human organism, and therefore on our Lord's real humanity, would be to interrupt the ordinary continuity of life, and quicken all perceptions of the spiritual world into a new intensity.'

*Olshausen* says that 'the number forty was certainly a sacred number with the Jews; but it does not follow thence that it is not to be taken exactly; but rather that the idea entertained by the Jews of the sacredness of certain numbers has itself a deeper foundation, which, taken as a general proposition, may be thus expressed: "According to Divine arrangement, which is pure harmony, every development proceeds by definite measure and number." The forty days of the temptation form an interesting parallel with Israel's forty years' journey through the wilderness. All the passages quoted in the history of Christ's temptation are taken from the narrative of that journey.'

## Paul's Conversion.

ACTS ix. 3, 4: 'And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*There is a strange blending of outward phenomena and inward experiences in this narrative: and it is difficult to recognise the limits of each.*

**Explanation.**—Many years ago we were much impressed by Neander's account of this incident, and, with the qualifications suggested in the passage we give from *Dean Plumptre*, it may be regarded as affording a very satisfactory account of an internal vision and revelation which was introduced by external circumstances.

'Paul had received many impressions which disturbed the repose of his truth-loving soul; he had heard the temperate counsels of his revered instructor Gamaliel; he had listened to the address of Stephen, to whom he was allied by natural temperament, and had witnessed his martyrdom. But he was still too deeply imbued with the spirit of Pharisaism to surrender himself to those impressions, so contrary to the prevailing bent of his mind. He forcibly repressed them; he rejected the thoughts that involuntarily rose in his mind in favour of the new doctrine, as the suggestions of Satan, whom he regarded as the sole contriver of this rebellion against the authority of the ancient traditions, and accordingly set himself with so much the greater ardour against the new sect. Yet he could not succeed altogether in suppressing these rising thoughts, and in silencing the voice of conscience, which rebuked his fanaticism. A conflict arose in his soul. While in this state, an outward impression was added, which brought the internal process to maturity. Not far from Damascus he and his followers were overtaken by a violent storm; the lightning struck Paul, and he fell senseless to the ground. He attributed this catastrophe to the avenging power of the Messiah, whom in the person of his disciples he was persecuting, and, confounding the objective and subjective, converted this internal impression into an outward appearance of Christ to him: blinded by the lightning, and stunned by the fall, he came to Damascus.' (It should be understood that this is not Neander's own view of the incident, but a possible view from the purely natural standpoint.)

*Dean Plumptre's* note is as follows: It is not possible in such a history to draw a hard and fast line between the objective and the subjective. The man himself cannot say whether he is in the body,

or out of the body (2 Cor. xii. 2, 3). It is enough for him that he sees what others do not see, and hears what they do not hear, while they too hear and see enough to prove both to themselves and to him that something has occurred beyond the range of ordinary phenomena. Nothing in the narrative suggests the thought of a sudden thunderstorm, which has seemed to some writers a probable explanation of the facts. In that case, the gathering gloom, the dark rolling clouds, would have prepared the traveller for the lightning-flash. If this hypothesis be at all entertained—and as it does not necessarily exclude the supernatural element, and presents analogies to the Divine manifestations on Sinai (Exod. xix. 16) and Horeb (1 Kings xix. 11, 12) it may be entertained legitimately—we must think of the storm, if we take such a view, as coming with an almost instantaneous quickness, the first flash and crash striking all with terror, while the full revelation of the Christ was made to the consciousness and conscience of the future Apostle.'

*Conybeare and Howson* remark on the external and internal features of the narrative. 'All fell to the ground in terror (xxvi. 14), or stood dumb with amazement (ix. 7). Suddenly surrounded by a light so terrible and incomprehensible, "they were afraid." "They heard not the voice of Him that spake to Paul" (xxii. 9), or, if they heard a voice, "they saw no man." (ix. 7). The whole scene was evidently one of the utmost confusion: and the accounts are such as to express, in the most striking manner, the bewilderment and alarm of the travellers. But while the others were stunned, stupefied and confused, a clear light broke in terribly *on the soul* of one of those who were prostrated on the ground.'

### The Withered Fig-Tree.

MARK xi. 20: 'And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig-tree withered away from the roots.'

**Question.**—*Was this a sudden consummation of disease in the tree, or the direct result of our Lord's curse, without any previous evil in the tree?*

**Answer.**—We have elsewhere dealt with this incident in its moral aspects, and need only refer here to the *form* which the miraculous judgment of the tree took. It may be well, however, to recall to mind that our Lord used the tree as a medium for symbolical or picture teaching; we may therefore seek to discover the points which would make such picture-teaching more effective. As He was illustrating the condition and doom of a hypocritical

nation, it is more reasonable to assume that there was decay in the tree, some deficiency of vitality which led to its bringing forth leaves only. Then this may be treated as a *time-miracle*—one in which the natural process of judgment is simply hastened, that, so, conviction of evil and Divine judgment of evil may be seen close together, and due impressions produced by the sight. It was a corrupt tree. In the ordinary course of things it would, after a time, have withered. Its condition was found out by the all-searching One; and its doom was pronounced and executed as a solemn warning to our Lord's disciples. On any other assumption than that of the rottenness of the tree, there can be no point in treating it as an illustration of Divine judgment on the hypocritical. Judgment on the innocent, and healthy, and right-doing, Jesus could not have spoken.

*Farrar* states the case of the tree very clearly: 'The sap was circulating, the leaves made a fair show; but of fruit there was none. Fit emblem of a hypocrite, whose external semblance is a delusion and sham—fit emblem of the nation in whom the ostentatious profession of religion brought forth no "fruit of good living"—the tree was barren. And it was *hopelessly* barren; for had it been fruitful the previous year, there would still have been some of the *kermouses* (violet-coloured autumn figs) hidden under those broad leaves; and had it been fruitful this year, the *bakkeoroth* (first-ripe figs) would have set into green and delicious fragrance before the leaves appeared; but on this fruitless tree there was neither any promise for the future, nor any gleanings from the past. And therefore, since it was but deceptive and useless, a barren cumberer of the ground, He made it the eternal warning against a life of hypocrisy continued until it is too late, and, in the hearing of His disciples, uttered upon it the solemn fiat, "Never fruit grow upon thee more!" Even at the word, such infructuous life as it possessed was arrested, and it began to wither.'

*Edersheim's* note is suggestive: 'It was evidently a barren fig-tree, cumbering the ground, and to be hewn down. Our mind almost instinctively reverts to the Parable of the Barren Fig-tree, which he had so lately spoken (Luke xiii. 6-9). To Him who but yesterday had wept over the Jerusalem that knew not the day of its visitation, and over which the sharp axe of judgment was already lifted, this fig-tree, with its luxuriant mantle of leaves, must have recalled, with pictorial vividness, the scene of the previous day. Israel was that barren fig-tree; and the leaves only covered their nakedness, as erst they had that of our first parents after their fall. And the judgment, symbolically spoken in the parable, must be symbolically executed in this leafy fig-tree, barren when searched for fruit by the Master.'

## The Transfiguration.

MATTHEW xvii. 2 : 'And He was transfigured before them : and His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light.'

**Question.**—*Is this incident to be classed among 'visions,' or are we to understand that some miraculous change was wrought on Christ, and some supernatural conditions were arranged for Him ?*

**Answer.**—The view taken of the scene of the Transfiguration directly depends on the view taken of the person of the Lord Jesus. If He was the Son of God, 'God manifest in the flesh,' it can in no way surprise us that, on occasion, He should have direct access to the spiritual, the heavenly world. There are two other scenes in our Lord's life with which the Transfiguration should be compared. The one is the descent of the Holy Ghost on Him, under the symbol of a brooding dove, after His baptism. The other is the sound as of thunder, and the responding voice of the Father, saying of His Father-name, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' And it should be noticed that the first direct manifestation of God to Christ—at His baptism—occurred as the beginning of His active mission as a teacher. The second—at the Transfiguration—occurred as a starting of Christ on the suffering side of His mission. And the third—the thunder-voice—as a precise assurance and encouragement when our Lord was entering upon His Passion.

It is significant that each case of special manifestation bore direct relation to the mental condition of our Lord Himself. We dwell so constantly on the vicarious character of our Lord's whole life, and words, and works, that perhaps we do not sufficiently *sympathize with Him*, or realize what support He needed—spiritual support—in carrying out His life-mission. Only when we can appreciate the limitations of the human condition, to which the Divine Christ voluntarily submitted Himself, can we understand what spiritual helps He needed. If St. Paul needed the support of occasional visions in His arduous life, how much more were such direct Divine communications needed by the Son of God, while pressed into the limitations and humiliations of a human life.

*Neander* has the following fine and suggestive note : 'It formed part of the trial and self-denial of Christ through His whole life, that, together with the consciousness that He was the Son of God, He combined the weakness and dependence of humanity. These affected the lesser powers of His soul, although they could never

move His unchangingly holy will, and turn Him to any selfish strivings.'

We should call the Transfiguration a vision if it was a scene related to a human being. In the case of our Lord it is more than a vision, it is other than a vision. It is the temporary freedom of the Son of God from His body limitations: a temporary resumption of heavenly conditions in a heavenly sphere: a freedom from the human for the sake of a time of Divine and spiritual communion. We think it an incomprehensible scene, save for those who can see God in Man, in the Man Christ Jesus. The attendant disciples gained no more than a general impression of a surpassing glory. The scene was real only to Christ, and bore direct relation to His own spiritual necessities. It lay in that region of the supernatural which was the proper, the eternal, sphere of the Son of God. To Him it was not vision, because to Him the spiritual was the real. To the watching disciples all was vision, because spiritual things and spiritual persons must get sensible *appearances* to adapt them to the apprehension of mortal senses. Rightly understood, the Transfiguration sheds the clearest light on the Divine nature of Christ.

Rapture, in prolonged times of prayer, is the human experience which alone can be suggested as bearing any likeness to this Transfiguration of Christ; and we can but feel how far short the most ecstatic human raptures must ever come. The experience of our Lord is unique. It stands alone *because He stands alone*. 'The Transfiguration, with its attendant glorified Ministry and Voice from heaven, was God's answer to Christ's prayer.' 'If Jesus was the very Christ of God, then this event can scarcely be described as miraculous—at least in such a history. If we would not expect it, it is certainly that which might have been expected.'—*Edersheim*.

### Miracles that seem to be Mere Wonders.

MARK vi. 48-50: 'And seeing them distressed in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them, about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them, walking on the sea: and He would have passed by them: but they, when they saw Him walking on the sea, supposed that it was an apparition, and cried out; for they all saw Him, and were troubled' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*Our Lord is supposed to have only wrought miracles in service to others, and as a part of His mission; but it is not easy to see any benefit bestowed, or any trouble removed, by this walking on the sea.*

**Explanation.**—*Trench* tells us that the name 'wonders' is never applied to the miracles except in connection with some other

name. They are continually 'signs *and* wonders;' or 'signs' alone; or 'powers' alone; but never 'wonders' alone. Miracles are always signs and pledges of something more than and beyond themselves.

It is true that it was, from the first, an absolute law with Christ, that He might not, and He would not, use the miraculous powers with which He was entrusted for His own private purposes, His own defence, or His own supply. And yet exactly this He appears on several occasions to have done. He stilled the waves that involved His own peril. He sought in a miraculous way the money needed to pay the Temple tax. He 'walked the waves in wondrous guise.' He cursed the fig-tree that deceived Him. In each case, no physical good to others answered to the putting forth of His power. But, in each case, *moral good* did; educational good for the disciples, and for us through them. And if we rightly estimated the relative values of the physical and the moral, we should think those miracles, that look at first like mere wonder-working, were more strictly within His rule than the others. They were even more truly done 'not unto self.'

In the case of walking on the sea, the immediate connection of the miracle with the consequences of the miracle of feeding the thousands must be noticed. The people, excited by that display of Divine power, were about by force to "make Him a King," and the Apostles were disposed to favour the idea of the people. It was a moment for prompt and decisive action. So our Lord dismissed the people, sent away the disciples, and retired into the mountain.

But it was most important to correct the carnal notions of Him which the disciples evidently cherished, and to make them feel that He was a *spiritual* Lord and King. And His walking on the water was His gracious effort to awaken thought about Himself in their minds, and to lead them to worthier apprehensions of His mystery. The act had in view the spiritual training of those disciples. 'This manifestation of Christ's hidden glory was designed to build up His disciples in the faith. They saw more and more clearly with whom they had to do, and perceived that He was the revelation of the invisible Father, who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.'

## Opened Graves at the Crucifixion.

MATTHEW xxvii. 52, 53 : 'And the tombs were opened ; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised ; and coming forth out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered into the holy city, and appeared unto many' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*The statements here made are so singular, so vague, and so unsupported, that we seem to be reading a legend of the time rather than historical fact.*

**Explanation.**—The passage is preserved in the Revised Version, so we may assume that there is sufficient justification of it in the original manuscripts ; but it stands alone ; Mark and Luke limit themselves to recording the rending of the vail, John refers to none of the portents.

The passage has always been a serious stumbling-block, and, with a sort of tacit consent, Christian people pass it over, as a strange record that, in some unknown way, has gained a place in the text. No names are given of those who appeared, or of those to whom they appeared. What saints can be meant it is impossible for us to guess. The bodies are said to be raised, but it does not appear whether this is equivalent to saying that the dead were restored to life. These raised bodies are said to have 'appeared,' which is a term suitable for a temporary vision, rather than for an actually restored fellowship. We never hear afterwards anything concerning these raised bodies. And, strangest of all, the bodies were raised on the evening of the crucifixion, and they only appeared to people in the holy city after the resurrection.

The complications are so great that it is quite impossible for us to receive these verses as a part of Matthew's Gospel ; and it is better to say at once that they are so completely out of harmony with the Gospel, that they must be an interpolation : they suit such books of mere wonders as the Apocryphal gospels, they have no proper place in the genuine Gospels, which contain no records of unnecessary and useless miracles. Man invents such stories as this ; those which God inspires have never the characteristic features of this.

It is singular to find Christian writers slipping over these verses, leaving them, as if explanation of them were hopeless. *Neander, Dr. Geikie*, and the writer in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools* give no notes. The *Speaker's Commentary* does not attempt to relieve the difficulties. *Alford* accepts the passage as genuine, and finds sufficient justification for it in the symbolical teaching it contains. Those

who think the original Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, give the Greek editor the credit of having added these verses. Some of the ancient fathers understood the Holy City to mean the 'heavenly Jerusalem,' which shows plainly how the difficulties of the passage have always perplexed Christian hearts.

*Farrar* says: 'An earthquake shook the earth and split the rocks, and as it rolled away from their places the great stones which closed and covered the cavern sepulchres of the Jews, so it seemed to the imaginations of many to have disimprisoned the spirits of the dead, and to have filled the air with ghostly visitants, who after Christ had risen appeared to linger in the Holy City. Only in some such way as this can I account for the singular and wholly isolated allusion of Matthew.'

*Dean Plumptre* looks at the narrative in the light of his views respecting our Lord's descent into Hades, but no one more skilfully presents the difficulties of the passage, or more considerately suggests the views which reverent Bible readers may take, in the hope of relieving the difficulties. He says: 'It is scarcely, perhaps, surprising that a narrative so exceptional in its marvellousness, and standing, as it does, without any collateral testimony in any other part of the New Testament, should have presented to many minds difficulties which have seemed almost insuperable. They have, accordingly, either viewed it as a mythical addition, or, where they shrank from that extreme conclusion, have explained it as meaning simply that the bodies of the dead were exposed to view by the earthquake mentioned in the preceding verse, or have seen in it only the honest report of an over-excited imagination.'

In view of all that can be urged in favour of, and helpful to, an explanation of the passage, we deeply feel that it is everyway wiser, safer, and more honouring to God's Word, to think that it is a stranger, and has no business there. It is somebody's later addition which has crept into the text. *Matthew Henry* ends his notes on the passage with this striking sentence: 'The relating of this matter so briefly is a plain intimation to us that we must not look that way for a confirmation of our faith; we have a more sure word of prophecy.'

## Healings by Handkerchiefs and Aprons.

ACTS xix. 11, 12; 'And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out' (*Rev. Ver.*).

**Difficulty.**—*If we accept the fact of such miracles as wrought by Paul, it would seem only reasonable to accept the record of miracles by similar agencies in later and mediæval times.*

**Explanation.**—It is probably necessary for us very carefully to distinguish between the putting forth of the Apostle's power to heal, and *the sentiments entertained about that power by a very excitable people.* An amount of public enthusiasm and excitement was raised by Paul's use of his gifts, and men were carried away to imagine a good deal that did not happen by Paul's direct agency.

Thomson, in the *Land and Book*, helps us to understand the form which such excitements usually take in the East: 'The external instruments connected with working miracles had, in ancient times, transferred to them, in imagination, a portion of the sanctity and reverence due to him who used them, or to that Divine power which was transmitted through them. This applied not only to the staves, robes, and mantles of prophets while living, but to the same things, to their bones also, and even to their very gravestones, when dead. The same thing exists to this day, and even in an exaggerated form. It is now very common to bind on, or wrap round the sick, some part of the robes of reputed saints, in the belief that healing virtue will be communicated from it. The same faith, or rather feeling, led the people to bring out their sick into the streets, that even the shadow of Peter might overshadow some of them' (Acts v. 15).

Probably the reason for allowing such a great and unusual effusion of the healing power in this case of Paul's, is to be found in the necessity for providing some counterpoise to the magical and theurgic practices to which the Ephesians were devoted; the true must be set in forcible contrast with the false, even in the lines of action which were commonly taken by the false.

Nothing wiser on this subject can be found than the following note by *Dean Plumptre*: 'The picture suggested is that of devout persons coming to the Apostle as he laboured at his craft, and carrying away with them the very handkerchiefs and aprons that he had used, as precious relics, that conveyed the supernatural gift of healing which he exercised. . . . The two conditions of the supernatural work of healing were a Divine Power on the one hand, and Faith on the

other, and any external medium might serve to strengthen the latter and bring it into contact with the former. Cures, more or less analogous, ascribed to the relics of saints admit, in some measure, of a like explanation. Without pretending to draw a sharp line of demarcation between the natural and supernatural, it is clear that a strong belief in the possibility of a healing work as likely or certain to be accompanied by any special agents, does much to stimulate the activity of the *vis medicatrix naturæ* which before was passive and inert. It is not unreasonable to see in the works of healing so wrought a special adaptation to the antecedent habits of mind of a population like that of Ephesus. It was something for them to learn that the prayer of faith and the handkerchief that had touched the Apostle's skin had a greater power to heal than the charms in which they had previously trusted.'

*Conybeare* and *Howson* say: 'We are not to suppose that the Apostles were always able to work miracles at will. An influx of supernatural power was given to them at the time and according to the circumstances that required it. And the character of the miracles was not always the same. They were accommodated to the peculiar forms of sin, superstition, and ignorance they were required to oppose. Here at Ephesus St. Paul was in the face of magicians, like Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh; and it is distinctly said that his miracles were "not ordinary wonders"; from which we may infer that they were different from those which he usually performed.'

### Our Lord's Resurrection Body.

LUKE xxiv. 31: 'And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight' (*Marg.*: 'ceased to be seen of them').

**Question.**—*Can our Lord's body after the resurrection be the same as He had before His death; for it was evidently not subject to ordinary conditions and limitations?*

**Answer.**—At first our attention may be absorbed with the evidences of identity between the human body and the resurrection body of Christ. Much is made of our Lord's appeal to Thomas to test the reality of His bodily presence by touching the body-marks of nails and spear. And yet the more the narrative of the forty days in the resurrection body is meditated on, the more impressively we are convinced that our Lord's body was other than it had been. He came forth from the tomb, leaving His grave-clothes behind, and yet Mary saw Him in the garden *clothed*. He forbade Mary to touch Him, on the ground that He was in a state just ready for His ascension, and fitted for the heavenly rather than the earthly spheres. He

came in when doors were shut. He vanished out of sight. Nobody ever knew where He dwelt. He went to Galilee, but no one accompanied Him. The recognition of His disciples was on no occasion immediate. At last, He simply went up out of sight—without any further change. We are now getting to understand better that our Lord's resurrection was no mere resumption of life such as Lazarus experienced. Our Lord rose, as the dead are to rise at last, to a *spiritual* body, made sensible to human apprehension for a time, but really fitted for spiritual and eternal spheres. There was a natural body, and there was a spiritual body; and they were the same body. The one thing which the resurrection is to persuade us of is the *continued life of Christ*. It is in no way necessary to such a persuasion that our Lord should resume all the conditions of His old bodily life. He lives. Death, the mightiest energy of sin, could not, did not, hold Him.

*Pressensé* states this distinction: 'The glorification of Jesus commenced from the day when He rose from the grave. His body was no phantom, it retained its reality, since it could be handled and felt, could eat and drink; but it was, nevertheless, invested with new properties, which distinguished it from its former condition. Jesus was not at once recognised by His disciples; He seemed able to transport Himself with strange rapidity from place to place. In the Ascension He resumed all the glory which belonged to Him, and in that glory those Divine attributes, by virtue of which He governs His Church, and gives Himself, by His Spirit, to be the life of each believing soul.'

*Stalker* says: 'Christ rose from the dead in a transfigured body.'

*Farrar* says: 'There was something spiritual, something not of earth, in that risen and glorified body.'

*Ewald* says: The disciples 'saw Him, not as a common man, or as a shade or ghost risen from the grave; but as the one only Son of God—already more than man at once in nature and power; and that all who thus beheld Him, recognised at once and instinctively His unique Divine dignity, and firmly believed in it thenceforth. . . . That former familiar appearance of the earthly Christ, and this higher vision of Him, with its depth of emotion and ecstatic joy, were so inter-related that even in the first days or weeks after His death, they could never have seen in Him the Heavenly Messiah, if they had not first known Him so well as the earthly.'

*Edersheim* says: 'The Christ must have borne in His glorified body all that He was, all that even His most intimate disciples had not known nor understood while He was with them.'

## The Magian Star.

MATTHEW ii. 9: And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.'

**Question.**—*Will any astronomical phenomenon sufficiently explain the appearance of this star, or must it be regarded as a miraculous direction of the Magi?*

**Answer.**—It would be quite in harmony with the Divine method, if we assume, that the thoughts of the wise men were divinely guided, in the line of their usual observations and studies. It is quite possible that they observed either a new star, or a singular conjunction of stars, in a quarter of the heavens which indicated the birth of a great sovereign somewhere in the countries westward. But it is impossible for us to go beyond suggestions and conjectures as to the appearances which they observed. We need not assert a miracle until all reasonable natural explanations have been patiently considered and judiciously estimated.

*Pressensé* deals with the incident wisely and yet liberally: 'The sidereal appearance which led to the journey of the Magi was no miracle, else it would have aroused a universal astonishment, of which some trace would have been preserved by the historians of the time. Persian *savans* have confirmed it by their observations. There is, therefore, no reason for supposing the phenomenon to be other than the conjunction which, according to Kepler, took place about this period. The Magi bent their steps toward Judæa, probably from a previous acquaintance with Jewish prophecies, or from a distant echo which had reached them, to the effect that Messiah was to be born in that country. Arrived at Jerusalem, they are compelled to inquire where is the town in which he is expected. The reappearance of the star over Bethlehem confirms the exact indications given them. Now, a star could not stand over a house; its shining could not be thus concentrated on one point. But it is quite possible that, after being for a time hidden, it might reappear at the very moment in which a fixed spot is reached. The Gospel narrative uses popular language, as when it speaks of the rising and setting of the sun, and makes no pretence to scientific exactness in the description of natural appearances. Thus the Magi were led into Judæa primarily by their holy aspirations.'

*Neander* says: 'It is not necessary to suppose that an actual miracle was wrought in this case; the course of natural events under Divine guidance was made to lead to Christ, just as the general

moral culture of the heathen, though under natural forms, was made to lead to the knowledge of the Saviour.'

Probably the best information at command on this subject is that given by Dr. Edersheim, in his *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. It is necessary to give his passage almost in full :

'There is one illustrative Jewish statement which, though not astrological, is of the greatest importance, although it seems to have been hitherto overlooked. Since the appearance of *Münter's* well-known tractate on the Star of the Magi, writers have endeavoured to show that Jewish expectancy of a Messiah was connected with a peculiar sidereal conjunction, such as that which occurred two years before the birth of our Lord, and this on the ground of a quotation from the well-known Jewish commentator Abarbanel (or rather Abrabanel). In his commentary on Daniel, that Rabbi laid it down, that the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces betokened not only the most important events, but referred especially to Israel (for which he gives five mystic reasons). He further argues that, as that conjunction had taken place three years before the birth of Moses, which heralded the first deliverance of Israel, so it would also precede the birth of the Messiah, and the final deliverance of Israel. But the argument fails, not only because Abarbanel's calculations are inconclusive and even erroneous, but because it is manifestly unfair to infer the state of Jewish belief at the time of Christ from a haphazard astrological conceit of a Rabbi of the fifteenth century. There is, however, testimony which seems to us not only reliable, but embodies most ancient Jewish tradition. It is contained in one of the smaller *Midrashim*, of which a collection has lately been published. On account of its importance, one quotation at least from it should be made in full. The so-called Messiah-Haggadah (*Aggadoth Meshiach*) opens as follows ; "*A star shall come out of Jacob*. There is a Boraita in the name of the Rabbis : The heptad in which the Son of David cometh—in the *first* year, there will not be sufficient nourishment ; in the *second* year the arrows of famine are launched ; in the *third*, a great famine ; in the *fourth*, neither famine nor plenty ; in the *fifth*, great abundance, and *the star shall shine forth from the east, and this is the star of the Messiah*. And it will shine from the east for fifteen days, and if it be prolonged, it will be for the good of Israel ; in the *sixth*, sayings (voices) and announcements (hearings) ; in the *seventh*, wails, and at the close of the seventh the Messiah is to be expected." A similar statement occurs at the close of a collection of three Midrashim—respectively entitled, *The Book of Elijah*, *Chapters about the Messiah*, and *The Mysteries of R.*

*Simon, the son of Jochai*—where we read that a star in the east was to appear two years before the birth of the Messiah. The statement is almost equally remarkable, whether it represents a tradition previous to the birth of Jesus, or originated after that event. But *two years* before the birth of Christ, which, as we have calculated, took place in December, 749 A.U.C., or five before the Christian era, brings us to the year 747 A.U.C., or seven before Christ, in which such a star should appear in the east. Did such a star, then, really appear in the east seven years before the Christian era? Astronomically speaking, and without any reference to controversy, there can be no doubt that the most remarkable conjunction of planets—that of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces, which occurs only once in 800 years—did take place no less than three times in the year 747 A.U.C., or two years before the birth of Christ (in May, October, and December). This conjunction is admitted by all astronomers. It was not only extraordinary, but presented the most brilliant spectacle in the night sky, such as could not but attract the attention of all who watched the sidereal heavens, but especially of those who busied themselves with astrology. In the year following, that is, in 748 A.U.C., another planet, Mars, joined this conjunction. The merit of first discovering these facts—of which it is unnecessary here to present the literary history—belongs to the great *Kepler*, who, accordingly, placed the nativity of Christ in the year 748 A.U.C. This date, however, is not only well-nigh impossible, but it has also been shown that such a conjunction would, for various reasons, not answer the requirements of the Evangelical narrative, so far as the *guidance* to Bethlehem is concerned. But it does fully account for the attention of the Magi being aroused, and—even if they had not possessed knowledge of the Jewish expectancy above described—for their making inquiry of all around, and certainly, among others, of the Jews. Here we leave the domain of the *certain*, and enter upon that of the *probable*. Kepler, who was led to the discovery by observing a similar conjunction in 1603-4, also noticed, that when the three planets came into conjunction, a new, extraordinarily brilliant, and peculiarly coloured evanescent star was visible between Jupiter and Saturn, and he suggested that a similar star had appeared under the same circumstances in the conjunction preceding the Nativity. Of this, of course, there is not, and cannot be, absolute certainty. But, if so, this would be “the star” of the Magi “in its rising.” There is yet another remarkable statement which, however, must also be assigned only to the domain of the *probable*. In the astronomical tables of the Chinese—to whose general trustworthiness

so high an authority as *Humboldt* bears testimony—the appearance of an evanescent star was noted. *Pingré* and others have designated it as a comet, and calculated its first appearance in February, 750 A.U.C., which is just the time when the Magi would, in all probability, leave Jerusalem for Bethlehem, since this must have preceded the death of Herod, which took place in March, 750. Moreover, it has been astronomically ascertained that such a sidereal apparition would be visible to those who left Jerusalem, and that it would point—almost seem to go before—in the direction of, and stand over, Bethlehem.’

Such, impartially stated, are the facts of the case; and here the subject must, in the present state of our information, be left.

### Miraculous Release of Apostles.

ACTS v. 19 : ‘But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth.’ (See also chap. xii. 6-11.)

**Difficulty.**—*Such a temporary deliverance seems an ineffective display of power, for the apostles were arrested again the next day.*

**Explanation.**—The thing to decide in this case is the *moral* impression which such a deliverance would produce, both on the disciples, and on the enemies of our Lord. That moral impression alone can account for what is certainly a supernatural event. The mere rescue of the disciples was quite a secondary matter; but it was of the first importance that the company of disciples should feel that a Divine shield was around them, and it was of equal importance that their enemies should be made to fear to touch them, seeing that the Lord was evidently with them.

Comparing the two cases, we gather that the statement concerning the angel opening the prison doors is the explanation which the delivered give of their deliverance. It is the only way in which they can account for what happened; but it is not said that they saw any angel. A Jew thought of all unusual circumstances, or deliverances, as the work of an angel. More especially in the case of Peter we can see that he was in a trance, or somnambulant state, for it is said that when he reached a certain street, ‘he came to himself.’ It is well known that the somnambulist can do the most extraordinary things in his unconsciousness; and, in accordance with the principle which we have accepted in treating of all the miraculous interpositions, we may recognise the somnambulant state as the *agency* which God was pleased to use on these occasions in extraordinary measures.

*Dean Plumptre*, noticing that Peter must himself have furnished this account of his experiences, adds : 'As in the activity of somnambulism, the will directed the actions of the body, and yet was only half conscious of what it did. It may be noted that his experience of the trance and vision narrated in chap. x. would tend to suggest the impression that he was passing through phenomena of a like kind.'

*Olshausen* deals fully with these incidents, in view of the naturalistic explanations that have been offered. 'The account which follows of the deliverance of Peter from imprisonment, illustrates the shorter account of a similar occurrence which is communicated at chap. v. 17, etc. ; and it also readily admits of being compared with the wonderful deliverance of Paul and Silas from imprisonment at Philippi, recorded in chap. xi. 26, etc. An impartial comparison of these narratives may perhaps leave it uncertain for a moment, whether real visible appearances of angels are meant in them ; and this again accounts for the fact, that we find the more recent interpreters adopting very different views of these occurrences. According to *Hazel*, it was a thunderstorm combined with an earthquake which delivered Peter, and this natural phenomenon was described by him, after the Jewish manner of speaking, as an angel. According to *Eichhorn*, who is followed by *Heinrichs*, Peter was delivered by Christian friends, or by the keeper of the prison himself, but he did not well know himself to whom he owed his deliverance, and therefore supposed he must ascribe it to a Divine messenger. *Kuinoel* expresses himself undecidedly ; while all the older interpreters understood the angelic appearance in the literal sense. Now with respect to the first view, it is undeniable that natural phenomena of a certain kind are styled angels ; and there can be no doubt that in chap. xvi. 26, etc., it is an earthquake only that must be thought of, for even the text refers to nothing else ; but the representation made in the passage before us does not permit this supposition, because the seventh and eighth verses (chap. xii.) describe the angel as acting quite like a person : the like description is never found where natural powers are styled angels. Far more plausible is the other view, which supposes Peter himself not to have known how his deliverance was effected. This idea appears to be favoured by the words in verse 9 : "And wist not that it was true which was done by the angel," taken in connection with verse 11, according to which latter passage Peter first comes to himself in the street, and appears now to conclude that an angel must have delivered him. But these words cannot establish that view, because, in the *first* place, it was contrary to the principles of the

Christians to deliver either themselves or others from such dangers by fraudulent artifices. But certainly on this view it must be supposed that either the jailor or the soldiers were bribed by Peter's deliverer ; and should it be said that the jailor himself might be favourably disposed toward the apostles, yet not the less would he have violated his duty, if he had let the prisoners escape. Again, this view gives no explanation of the unconscious condition of Peter : amid so many occurrences and incidents, he could not fail to overcome the oppression of sleep, and to recognise the friend that was helping him. In fine, the fact that the soldiers did not awake, as is plain from verse 18, till the morning, but little accords with this view. The only matter, therefore, which can properly be made a question here, is whether we are to suppose a real appearance of an angel or only a vision. Now certainly the occurrence did bear some resemblance to an ecstatic vision, for Peter himself took this view of it for a time (ver. 9), but the *reality* of the effects which were connected with it does not permit the supposition of a mere vision, and it was on this very ground that Peter himself came to the conclusion that he had been favoured with an actual visit from an angel. A mere mental vision is never accompanied with physical effects. That he might be uncertain, however, for a moment, whether it was a vision he saw or a real angelic appearance, is to be explained from the fact, that every manifestation from the higher order of existences is attended with a powerful excitement in the soul, which produces a state of mind akin to ecstasy. And this may easily render it uncertain whether the whole be something purely internal, or whether there be also something outward : the grand criterion in favour of the latter is the appearance of real visible results.'

### Philip Caught Away.

ACTS viii. 39 : ' And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more : and he went on his way rejoicing.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that Philip was suddenly taken up, or away, out of the sight of the eunuch, or is the narrative sufficiently explained by assuming that Philip hurried away ?*

**Answer.**—The last incident of this interview receives at least partial explanation from two previous incidents. From verse 26 we learn, that a special direction was given to Philip as to the route he should take. The direction is said to have been given by 'an angel,' but we are not told whether any outward form appeared

to him, or whether the angel's suggestion came as an inward impulse. If we can realize that God presides over the will, the judgment, and the decision, according to the promise, 'The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way,' it will not be difficult to understand that Philip recognised Divine guidance in a very strong inward impulse to do what seemed a somewhat unreasonable, or at least useless, thing. When the eunuch's chariot came in sight, we are told that 'the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot' (ver. 29). In this case an inward impulsions, that seemed like the hearing of an actual voice, is clearly meant. We have, therefore, three descriptions of similar incidents, and one description helping another; we gather that in each case an intense inward desire, a feeling that he *must* do such and such a thing, explains the action of this evangelist. 'An impulse so strong and irresistible that it was felt to be from the Spirit of the Lord led Philip to an abrupt and immediate departure. He was literally snatched away from his companion.'

*Dean Plumtre* thinks there may have been a 'suspension of the normal activity of consciousness,' and adds: 'As St. Bernard walked by the Lake of Geneva, and knew not that he was near it, so Philip rushed away, as drawn on he knew not whither, as in a state of ecstasy; and so, in informing St. Luke of what passed (it is obvious that the report must, in the first instance, have come from him), could give no other account of his journeying than that he was "found" at Azotus.'

Noticing that in verse 26 an 'angel' is mentioned, and in verse 29 the 'Spirit,' *Olshausen* observes that 'by angels we are by no means always to understand beings appearing as individuals, but often spiritual powers. Even in verse 26, we are not to suppose the actual appearance of an angel, but an inward spiritual communication which was made to Philip. . . . He goes not his own way, but the impulses of the Spirit guide all his steps.'

*Barnes* is almost fierce on those who see the miraculous in this incident. The phrase 'caught away' has been usually understood of a *forcible* or *miraculous* removal of Philip to some other place. Some have even supposed that he was borne through the air by an angel. (See even *Doddridge*.) To such foolish interpretations have many expositors been led. The meaning is, clearly, that the Spirit, who had directed Philip to go near the eunuch, now removed him in a similar manner. It is not wise to suppose the existence of a miracle, except where the effect cannot otherwise be accounted for, and except where there is a plain statement that there was a

miracle. All that can be signified here is, that the Spirit *strongly admonished* Philip to go to some other place; that He so *forcibly or vividly suggested* the duty to his mind, as to tear him away, as it were, from the society of the eunuch.

## Miracles of Supply.

JOHN ii. 11: 'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory.'

**Difficulty.**—*There must surely have been some deep moral purpose which explains a miracle—and a class of miracles—that seems too trivial for a putting forth of miraculous powers.*

**Explanation.**—All the miracles of supply can have the objection brought against them, that they are very temporary removals of very insignificant disabilities. Our answer to the objection is, that a slight and simple incident may be a very effective picture-teaching; and that for man's welfare it is necessary to present great truths in small settings. It was a little thing to supply the wine deficiencies at a marriage-feast, but it was a great thing for Christ to manifest forth His glory.

In an introductory note to this section, we have given Dr. George Macdonald's suggestion for the reading of our Lord's miracles. It will interest our readers to see, in some detail, his mode of applying this suggestion to the miracles of supply. But it may be well first to notice that Dr. Macdonald's idea is but a revival of the older view of the miracles. *Dean Howson* remarks: 'It will suffice here to quote what was said, hundreds of years ago, by two great Christian writers; and it is surprising to see how Augustine and Chrysostom, in their Latin and Greek commentaries, employ the very same words which it is most to our purpose to use now. The substance of what they both say is this: men saw that which had been water suddenly turned into wine, and they wondered. But is not this same thing done every year in every vineyard? God works miracles daily in the whole range of creation, and they are disregarded, not because they are not full of wonder, but because they are common. That which is done slowly and gradually through the root and branches of the vine was here done quickly at the marriage-feast, and by the same power.'

*Dr. Macdonald* says: 'To him who can thank God with free heart for his good wine, there is a glad significance in the fact that our Lord's first miracle was this turning of water into wine. It is a true symbol of what He had done for the world in glorifying all things.

With His Divine alchemy He turns not only water into wine, but common things into radiant mysteries, yea, every meal into a Eucharist, and the sepulchre into an outgoing gate. . . . That the wine should be His first miracle, and that the feeding of the multitudes should be the only other creative miracle, will also suggest many thoughts in connection with the symbol He has left us of His relation to His brethren. In the wine and the bread of the Eucharist, He reminds us how utterly He has given, is giving, Himself for the gladness and strength of His Father's children. Yea more; for in that He is the radiation of the Father's glory, this bread and wine is the symbol of how utterly the Father gives Himself to His children, how earnestly He would have them partakers of His own being.'

Referring to the quietness with which the miracle was wrought, Dr. Macdonald adds: 'Herein we find another point in which this miracle of Jesus resembles the working of His Father. For God ministers to us so gently, so stolenly, as it were, with such a quiet, tender, loving absence of display, that men often drink of His wine, as these wedding guests drank, without knowing whence it comes—without thinking that the Giver is beside them, yea, in their very hearts. For God will not compel the adoration of men; it would be but a pagan worship that would bring to His altars. He will rouse in men a sense of need, which shall grow at length into a longing; He will make them feel after Him, until by their search becoming able to behold Him, He may at length reveal to them the glory of their Father.'

There is a difficulty, connected with this particular miracle, which presses heavily on many minds, and needs a passing reference. *Dean Howson* states it, and meets it. 'There seems to be here a sanction of the large use of intoxicating drinks; while yet we know that drunkenness is the prolific cause of fully half the dreadful moral evil that surrounds us in this country. What are we to say to this? I believe the most important thing to be said is this—that in all such matters God assumes to Himself the responsibility of asserting the blessing and the usefulness of that which He gives, and throws on us the responsibility of excess, and of its terrible consequences. Certain minor considerations are, indeed, to be carefully borne in mind, as, for instance, that the wine of that country was not a hot and fiery liquor, such as madcens too many in this climate (especially when it is adulterated), but a light and refreshing drink, by no means injurious to health when used in moderation—as all God's gifts are to be used.'

## Restored Eutychus.

ACTS xx. 10: 'And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that Paul corrected the fear of the people that Eutychus was really dead, or must we accept the fact that he was actually, and at once, killed by the fall?*

**Answer.**—It is certainly unlikely that a fall from a second-story window would result in immediate death, but it is not impossible; and as Eutychus fell in his sleep, he would make no effort to mitigate the fall, by putting out his hands, or otherwise. We may be sure, too, that, in such an instance, a man would fall very heavily on his head. And yet the narrative may only give the general impression of the bystanders; the exclamation would at once be made by those who looked on the rigid figure, 'He is dead!' It does not quite appear whether Paul said 'his life is in him' before or after his efforts to restore animation; but it at once strikes attention that such an assurance would be very comforting before attempting to revive him, and very unnecessary when everybody could see the signs of returning consciousness. It must be said, however, that Paul may have made this remark to the company upstairs, after he returned to resume his preaching.

No dogmatic assertion should be made on this subject. It was quite within Paul's gift to restore the dead, or to restore the stunned; but our own feeling, upon due consideration of the narrative, is that the life of Eutychus was only suspended.

*Dean Plumtre* says, on verse 9: 'What follows is obviously related as a miraculous resuscitation; but it may be questioned, looking at St. Paul's words, "his life is in him," whether more than apparent death is meant. He was to all appearance dead—would have died but for the prayer of the Apostle; but there had been no fracture of limb or skull, and the cause of death, or of the state that looked like death, was the shock given to the brain and nerves by the violence of the fall.' 'The act of Paul reminds us of the acts of Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 21) and Elisha (2 Kings iv. 34). The close contact, the clasp of warm affection, gave a new intensity to the prayer of faith, and, as a current of vitality passed, as it were, from the one body to the other, enabled the Apostle to feel that the heart had not ceased to beat, and to give the calming assurance, 'his life is in him.'

## Paul's Visions.

ACTS xxvii. 23, 24 : 'For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul ; thou must be brought before Cæsar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.'

**Question.**—*In what manner are we to think of this and other direct Divine communications made to the Apostle Paul ?*

**Answer.**—It is not sufficiently apprehended that Paul claimed to have distinct and personal revelations from God. Called into the Christian discipleship by a 'heavenly vision,' it was characteristic of his entire Christian course that he was open to, sensitive to, heavenly visions. It is not probable that they were mere impressions by dreams, we rather regard them as waking visions, things seen and heard in times of ecstasy, rapture, absorption, trance, which often followed long seasons of prayer. Such revelations of the Divine will were most real to Paul ; they were his direct audience of the Master whose service he had chosen when his first revelation came to him outside Damascus. Of one such vision he says, 'Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell,' and probably this was more or less his feeling on all the occasions.

*Olshausen* says of the vision by night that summoned Paul to Macedonia : 'This vision is commonly supposed to have been a dream, but the text does not necessarily lead to this conclusion, for "by night" does not exclude the idea of being awake. Paul may have seen the vision while praying by night, as it appears from chapter xvi. 25, he was wont to do. Besides, my fundamental principle as to the gradation of the modes of Divine revelation prevents me from admitting the idea of a dream here. Communication by dreams is the lowest form of revelation, and we do not meet with it elsewhere in the case of the apostles, who were endowed with the Holy Ghost. Their visions of ecstasy they always received in a waking condition.'

*Dean Plumptre* says : 'With most others of the enthusiastic type of character, visions, real or supposed, of messengers from the unseen world, have produced terror and agitation. With St. Paul they are the source of a calm strength and presence of mind which he is able, in his turn, to impress on others.'

Upon the Divine visions and revelations given to him Paul in great part rested his apostolic claim. To him an apostle was, just what a prophet of the olden time had been, a man who had direct and personal communications with the Lord Jesus, and received instructions immediately from Him. For such instances in Paul's career,

see Acts ix. 4-6 ; xvi. 9 ; xviii. 9 ; xxii. 18 ; xxiii. 11 ; 2 Cor. xii ; Gal. ii. 2. This claim to direct revelation the enemies of St. Paul denied, and laughed to scorn his pretensions as the indications of insanity.

*F. W. Robertson* says : 'To comprehend the visions we must comprehend the man. For God gives visions at His own will, and according to certain and fixed laws. He does not inspire everyone. He does not reveal His mysteries to men of selfish, or hard, or phlegmatic temperaments. He gives preternatural communication to those whom He prepares beforehand by a peculiar spiritual sensitiveness. There are, physically, certain sensitivenesses to sound and colour that qualify men to become gifted musicians and painters ; so, spiritually, there are certain strong original susceptibilities (I say *original*, as derived from God, the origin of all), and on these God bestows strange gifts and sights, deep feeling not to be uttered in human language, and immeasurable by the ordinary standard. Such a man was St. Paul—a very wondrous nature, the Jewish nature in all its strength. We know that the Jewish temperament fitted men to be the organs of a revelation. Its fervour, its moral sense, its veneration, its indomitable will, all adapted the highest sons of the nation for receiving hidden truths and communicating them to others.'

In ecclesiastical history mention is made of one Theodorus, a martyr put to extreme torments by Julian the Apostate, and dismissed again by him when he saw him unconquerable. Rufinus, in his history, says that he met with this martyr a long time after his trial, and asked him whether the pains he felt were not insufferable ? He answered that at first it was somewhat grievous, but after a while there seemed to stand by him a young man in white, who, with a soft and comfortable handkerchief, wiped off the sweat from his body (which through extreme anguish was little less than blood), and bade him be of good cheer, insomuch as that it was rather a punishment than a pleasure to him to be taken off the rack. When the tormentors had done, the angel was gone.

'Visions and revelations do not belong to any one age. We have no right to say that they are limited to ancient times. There have always been the true and the counterfeit ; but the true should not be missed or denied because the false have been found out. There are good gold coins, or men would not trouble to make spurious sovereigns. Fanaticism deludes its victims into imaginary visions, but souls that are kin with God, and open to Him, can receive communications from Him. See instances in Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, Isaiah,

Joseph (husband of Mary), Simeon, Zacharias, etc. So, in the Christian age, we find visions granted to Cornelius, Philip, Peter, John, as well as Paul, and traces of prophets, such as Agabus, and even of prophetesses. St. Paul's visions were probably of the nature of a trance; the mind being absorbed in contemplation may be prepared to receive Divine revealings. It is right to subject all claims to visions to careful scrutiny, and the things communicated to men at such times must be tested by their harmony with the written revelation; but we need not refuse to recognise the truth that God has direct relations to souls now as certainly as in past ages. Both truth and duty may still be revealed.'—*Pulpit Commentary*.

## The Announcement to Shepherds.

LUKE ii. 10, 11: 'And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'

**Difficulty.**—*There seems to be no incident recorded in the earlier Scriptures with which this manifestation to the shepherds can be compared; and it is not easy to see why they should have been selected as the recipients of so extraordinary and Divine a revelation.*

**Explanation.**—*Schleiermacher's* words give us a key to the understanding of this incident. 'There is something remarkable, something Divine, in the satisfaction not seldom afforded in extraordinary times even to individual longings.' We are compelled to think that these shepherds must have been men who were 'looking for redemption in Israel,' for we are well assured that such manifestations would only be granted to prepared hearts.

*Dr. C. Geikie* points this out: 'To have received such surpassing honour from above, they must have been members, though poor and humble, of that true Israel which included Mary and Joseph, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon and Anna—the representatives, in those dark days, of the saints of their nation in its brighter past. They must have been men looking out, in their simple way, towards the invisible and eternal, and seeking that Kingdom of God for themselves which was one day, as they believed, to be revealed in their nation at large. Only that mind which has sympathy with external nature can receive, in their true significance, the impressions it is fitted to convey, and only the heart which has sympathy with spiritual things can recognise their full meaning. Poetic sensibility is required in the one case, and religious in the other. In each it is the condition of sincere emotion.'

The associations of the place where these shepherds watched their flocks, and which may, in part at least, explain how it was that they were the chosen recipients of the revelation, are best brought out by *Dr. Edersheim*: 'Jewish tradition may here prove both illustrative and helpful. That the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief, that He was to be revealed from *Migdal Eder*, "the tower of the flock." This *Migdal Eder* was *not* the watch-tower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage in the Mishna leads to the conclusion that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple sacrifices, and, accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds. The latter were under the ban of Rabbinism, on account of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. The same Mishnic passage also leads us to infer that these flocks lay out *all the year round*, since they are spoken of as in the fields thirty days before the Passover—that is, in the month of February, when in Palestine the average rainfall is nearly greatest. Thus Jewish tradition in some dim manner apprehended the first revelation of the Messiah from that *Migdal Eder*, where shepherds watched the Temple flocks all the year round. Of the deep symbolic significance of such a coincidence, it is needless to speak.

'Only once before had the words of angels' hymn fallen upon mortal's ears, when, to Isaiah's rapt vision, Heaven's high Temple had opened, and the glory of Jehovah swept its courts, almost breaking down the trembling posts that bore its boundary gates. Now the same glory enwrap the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains. Then the angels' hymn had heralded the announcement of the Kingdom coming; now that of the King come. Then it had been the *Tris-Hagion* of prophetic anticipation; now that of Evangelic fulfilment.'

The suggestion that these were Temple shepherds seems approved by *Dean Plumptre*, who says: 'The statement in the Mishna that the sheep intended for a sacrifice in the Temple were pastured in the fields of Bethlehem gives a special interest to the fact thus narrated, and may, perhaps, in part, explain the faith and devotion of the shepherds. They had been rejoicing, at the Paschal season over the spring-tide birth of the lambs of their flocks. They now heard of the birth of the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."'

(*Dr. Edersheim* and *Dean Plumptre* do not agree on the season of the year in which our Lord was born. The former argues for Christmas-tide, the latter for spring.)

*Kitto* endeavours to meet the question : 'Why were these poor shepherds chosen as such witnesses ?' He replies : 'The Lord, who made choice of them, knows. It was necessary that the witnesses should reside in or near Bethlehem ; and these shepherds alone were abroad and awake in the depth of the silent night. Moreover, the Gospel delights to put honour on those of low degree. The general yearning for the appearance of the Messiah, which at this time was felt throughout Judæa, must have acquired peculiar intensity at Bethlehem, where it was known from prophecy that Christ should be born ; and no doubt, as *Neander* says, "even among the shepherds who kept nightly watch over their flocks, were some who anxiously awaited the appearance of the Messiah. It is true the account does not say that the shepherds thus longed for the Messiah. But we are justified, by what followed, in presupposing it as the ground for such a communication being especially made to them ; and it is not unlikely that these simple souls, untaught in the traditions of the scribes, and nourished by communion with God, amid the freedom of nature, in a solitude congenial with meditation and prayer, had formed a purer idea of the Messiah, from the necessities of their own hearts, than prevailed at that time among the Jews."'

*Pressensé's* note is very tender and suggestive. 'This great event (the birth of the Saviour), the most momentous in the history of the world—since it divides it into its two great parts, and is the hidden pole round which gravitate all human destinies—took place as unheeded as the most obscure. No one marked it, except the angels in heaven, and some shepherds who were keeping their flocks on one of the hills which surround Bethlehem. It was at a season of the year when the softened temperature sometimes made it needless to lead the sheep into the city at evening-time. It was, doubtless, one of those beautiful Oriental nights when the heavens proclaim nothing but mercy. These simple men were chosen as the first to receive the good tidings of great joy, because they were waiting for it. Everything in those fields, where the young David, like themselves, had fed his flock, reminded them of the promise made to his race, and they, as well as the scribes at Jerusalem, had doubtless read the mysterious oracle, which declared that the very ground they were treading should be the cradle of Messiah. Suddenly the startled air resounds with a mysterious choir ; they hear angelic voices, and Divine words proclaim in their ears—"Glory to God in the highest ; peace on earth, good will towards men" (E.V). The shepherds believed the things which were spoken ; simple, artless men they were, who had not learnt in the schools at Jerusalem to admit as possible mercy only that which

a Pharisee could comprehend. They deemed it not strange—and we are at one with them—that angels, man's elder brothers, dwelling in a purer region, where evil had not come, should celebrate with their sweetest songs such an event as the birth of the Redeemer.'

The general difficulties connected with all angel-manifestations, both in the earlier and later dispensations, will be found fully treated in other paragraphs.

### Paul's Recovery at Lystra.

ACTS xiv. 19, 20: 'But there came Jews thither from Antioch and Iconium; and, having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and entered into the city' (*Rev. Ver.*)

**Question.**—*Is this narrative intended to suggest that Paul was restored by any miraculous and Divine intervention?*

**Answer.**—There is no good reason for thinking so. Miracles seem never to have been wrought to secure Paul's safety in scenes of peril, protection from shipwreck, or recovery from ordinary sickness; and it is not likely there would be any exception in this case of stoning. No doubt Paul had swooned, and showed all the ordinary signs of death; but there are remarkable cases of temporary suspension of life, which fully illustrate both Paul's condition when dragged out of the city, and the suddenness of his recovering his vitality. Still, we are sure he must have been very prostrate after such treatment, bruised sadly, and needing prolonged rest and care.

The suggestion has been made, and is certainly deserving of consideration, that the vision of the 'third heavens,' of which he writes in 2 Cor. xii. 1-6, and of which he says: 'Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell,' was granted him, as a Divine comforting, in this time of swooning. The hints of time given seem to accord pretty well.

*Kitto* notices that, stoning not being a regular Gentile punishment, as it was a Jewish, this stoning of Paul was done in quite a tumultuous manner, and no special care was taken to secure that Paul was really dead. 'In this case it seems that Paul had not been killed, but only rendered insensible by some of the blows he had received.' It seems to us, however, a much more serious case than one of mere stunning.

*Conybeare* and *Howson* describe Paul as 'stoned somewhere in the streets of Lystra, and then dragged through the city gate, and cast outside the walls, under the belief that he was dead.' But they

almost suggest their belief in a special Divine intervention, by adding : ' By the power and goodness of God he rose from a state of apparent death as if by a sudden resurrection.'

*Farrar* gives good support to the explanation which we venture to give : ' They stoned Paul, and, when they thought he was dead, dragged him outside their city gates, leaving him, perhaps, in front of the very Temple of Jupiter to which they had been about to conduct him as an incarnation of their patron deity. But Paul was not dead. This had not been a Jewish stoning, conducted with fatal deliberateness, but a sudden riot, in which the mode of attack may be due to accident. Paul, *liable at all times to the swoons which accompany nervous organizations*, had been stunned, but not killed ; and while the disciples stood in an agonized group around what they thought to be his corpse, he recovered his consciousness, and raised himself from the ground. The mob, meanwhile, had dispersed ; and, perhaps, in disguise, or under cover of evening—for all these details were as nothing to Paul, and are not preserved by his biographer—he re-entered the little city.'

Brown, in the *Critical Commentary*, says of this incident : ' It is just possible that this recovery was natural ; the insensibility occasioned by such treatment as he had received sometimes passing away of itself, and leaving the patient less hurt than appears. But certainly the impression naturally left on the mind by the words is, that the restoration was miraculous, and so the best interpreters understand the words.'

## The Miracles and Jewish Symbols.

LUKE v. 12 : ' And it came to pass, when He was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy : who seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.'

**Question.**—*Are we justified in getting help from the symbolic system of Judaism, in our endeavour to understand the deeper moral teaching of our Lord's mighty works ?*

**Answer.**—Certainly we are. And probably very much more would be learned respecting our Lord's redeeming work, if we had but a fuller and a more accurate knowledge of Jewish symbolism. The whole subject cannot be treated here, but illustrations of it may be found in the Jewish sentiment about lepers, and Jewish customs in relation to lepers.

The following passage, from Archbishop Trench's invaluable work on the ' Miracles,' gives the special moral significance of the disease of leprosy.

‘The ordinances concerning leprosy had a deep significance, into which it will be needful a little to enter. It is clear that the same principle which made all that had to do with death, as mourning, a grave, a corpse, the occasions of a ceremonial uncleanness, inasmuch as all these were signs and consequences of sin, might, in like manner, and with a perfect consistency, have made *every sickness* a sign of uncleanness, each of these being also death beginning, partial death—echoes in the body of that terrible reality, sin in the soul. But, instead of this, in a gracious sparing of man, and not pushing the principle to the uttermost, God took but one sickness, one of these visible outcomings of a tainted nature, in which to testify that evil was not from Him, could not dwell with Him : He took but one with which to link this teaching, and that it may serve in this region of man’s life as the substratum for the training of His people into the recognition of a clinging impurity, which needed a Pure and a Purifier to overcome and expel, and which no method short of His taking of our flesh could drive out. And leprosy, which was indeed the sickness of sicknesses, was through these Levitical ordinances selected of God from the whole host of maladies and diseases which had broken in upon man’s body ; to the end that, bearing His testimony against that out of which it and all other sicknesses grew, against sin, as not from Him, as grievous in His sight ; and against the sickness itself also as grievous, inasmuch as it was a visible manifestation, a direct consequence, of the inner disharmony of man’s spirit, a commencement of the death which, through disobedience to God’s perfect will, had found entrance into a nature made by God for immortality.

‘And terrible indeed, as might be expected, was that disease, round which this solemn teaching revolved. Leprosy was, indeed, nothing short of a living death, a poisoning of the springs, a corrupting of all the humours of life ; a dissolution, little by little, of the whole body, so that one limb after another actually decayed and fell away. The disease, moreover, was incurable by the art and skill of man ; not that the leper might not return to health ; for, however rare, such cases are yet contemplated in the Levitical law.

‘Seeing then that leprosy was this outward and visible sign of the innermost spiritual corruption, this sacrament of death, there could be no fitter form of evil over which the Lord of life should display His power. He will thus prove Himself the conqueror of *death in life*, as elsewhere of death accomplished ; and His victory over this most terrible form of physical evil is, therefore, fitly urged as a testimony to His Messiahship : “The lepers are cleansed” (Matt. xi. 15).’

## Limitation of Miracle.

JOHN x. 41 : 'And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true.'

**Question.**—*Can the principles on which miraculous power was given, and the conditions under which it was restrained, be understood ?*

**Answer.**—No reader of the narratives of the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, can fail to have felt that the occasions on which our Lord and His disciples did *not* work miracles require explanation as truly as the miracles themselves.

It is stated as a matter which occasioned public remark, that John the Baptist 'did no miracle.' It was made an accusation against our Lord Himself when on His cross, that His pretensions as a miracle-worker were a sham, for He could not put forth power to save Himself in the time of His extremity. And we find the Apostle Paul doctored and nursed through more than one time of sickness, and showing no signs of a disposition to use miraculous power to meet his own need, nor resorting even to that 'faith-healing' which is the fanaticism of our times.

We are evidently to understand that the miraculous gift is never an endowment of a person, for the securing of his own ends. It is always an endowment *for a work* ; it belongs strictly and exclusively to the work. The man will find that the power is not at his command, if he attempts to use it outside the limits of his work.

Probably here lies a sufficient distinction between the true and the false claim to the possession of miraculous gifts. Does a man claim the possession as a *personal* possession, bringing him honour ? Then his is a false claim. Does a man use the power for his own personal ends ? Then his is a false claim. God endows for service, and for service only—for just that particular service to which he calls a man.

This law of limitation will be found strictly observed by our Lord and His apostles. It is indeed the great working law for all forms of Divine gift.

But this does not explain the fact that, though John the Baptist was a prophet, and under a direct call and commission from God, no sort of miraculous gifts were entrusted to him, for the doing of his particular work.

Miracles may be necessary as credentials of a speaker ; or to call attention to a message ; or to provide outward illustrations of spiritual truths or processes. But in neither sense had John the Baptist any necessity for them. John came as one of the old prophets. He was like one.

People accepted him as such. 'All men count John as a prophet.' Nobody asked for credentials. Nobody was staggered by his appearance, or habits, or claims, or words; as so many were with Christ. John had really an old message to deliver, which other prophets had delivered before him. The new piece of it was only this—the Kingdom and the King you have been long expecting are now close at hand;—but he needed no credentials for saying this. They would be fitting enough for Him who claimed to be the King.

Miracles were not needed to call attention to John's message, for everybody flocked to hear him; and he only demanded a right moral attitude. Conscience sufficiently certifies moral duties, and needs no help from miracles.

And miracles were not required for the illustration of John's message. A rite, which enabled penitent souls to give their penitence outward expression and seal it in a pledge, was the appropriate thing for him, and not miracle.

We may fix two points on attention. Miraculous gifts must be strictly limited to that particular kind of *service* for which they are given; and miraculous gifts are not the necessary or appropriate gifts for *all kinds of service*.

### Angel-Aids.

LUKE xxii. 43: 'And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.'

**Question.**—*Are we to understand that the watching disciples actually saw this angel; or is it the best explanation they can give of the mysterious support which their Lord evidently received in His great struggle?*

**Answer.**—In forming a judgment, due account must be taken of the fact that verses 43, 44, are omitted in some of the best Manuscripts. Though, on the whole, the balance of evidence may seem to be in favour of their retention, we must admit some uncertainty as to their origin. In the Gospels it is necessary, on many occasions, to distinguish between statements of fact, and statements which indicate only the impressions which certain facts produced on certain minds, or thoughts which writers had about the facts.

It also arrests attention that the evangelist only says the angel 'appeared unto Him.' He does not intimate that anyone else saw the angel, and the subsequent intercourse of Christ with the disciples before His arrest was so brief, that it is not at all likely He would tell them about the angel.

Probably *Dean Plumptre's* explanation will commend itself to all who feel the difficulty of this narrative. He says: 'He was conscious of a new strength to endure even to the end. And that strength would show itself to others, to disciples who watched Him afar off, in a new expression and look, flashes of victorious strength and joy alternating with throbs and spasms of anguish. Whence could that strength come but from the messengers of His Father, in whose presence, and in communion with whom he habitually lived (Matt. iv. 11; John i. 51). The ministrations which had been with Him in His first temptation were now with Him in the last (Matt. iv. 11).'

*Olshausen* understands here the angel of the 'accession of spiritual power.'

*Farrar* hesitates to speak firmly on the point, but he inclines to the idea that the appearance of the angel is the explanatory suggestion of the disciples. 'We may not intrude too closely into this scene. It is shrouded in a halo and a mystery into which no footsteps may penetrate. We, as we contemplate it, are like those disciples—our senses are confused, our perceptions are not clear. We can but enter into their amazement and sore distress. Half waking, half oppressed with an irresistible weight of troubled slumber, they only felt that they were dim witnesses of an unutterable agony, far deeper than anything which they could fathom, as it far transcended all that, even in our purest moments, we can pretend to understand. The place seems haunted by presences of good and evil, struggling in mighty but silent contest for the eternal victory. They see Him, before whom the demons had fled in howling terror, lying on His face upon the ground. They hear that voice wailing in murmurs of broken agony, which had commanded the wind and the sea, and they obeyed Him. The great drops of anguish which drop from Him in the deathly struggle, look to them like heavy gouts of blood. Under the dark shadow of the trees, amid the interrupted moonlight, *it seems to them that there is an angel with Him*, who supports His failing strength, who enables Him to rise victorious from those first prayers with nothing but the crimson traces of that bitter struggle upon His brow.'

It may be freely granted that, in like circumstances, the idea of an angel appearing to strengthen and help in a time of grave mental distress, is not the suggestion which would most readily come to us, but, if we properly understand the Jewish notions and sentiments about angels, we shall see that it is precisely the idea which would first come to the mind of these Jewish disciples. Some references have been previously made to the Jewish angelology, but it will be

helpful to the explanation of this, and other cases of angel aid, if we deal with it in some detail.

*Farrar* tells us that 'it is characteristic of the Oriental, and especially of the Semitic mind, to see in every event, even the most trivial, a direct supernatural interference, wrought by the innumerable unseen ministers—both good and evil—of the Divine will. The definite form in which the belief clothed itself was, by the admission of the Jews themselves, derived from Babylon.

'Even the most ordinary forces and phenomena of Nature, and passions of the mind, were by them regarded as angels. Thus, in the Jer. Targum on Deut. ix. 19, it is said that, to punish the Israelites for worshipping the golden calf, God sent five angels—Indignation, Anger, Fury, Ruin, Wrath. And they would have interpreted quite literally the verse—"He maketh the winds His angels, and fiery flames His ministers" (Ps. civ. 4).

'The number of the angels—the *Tsebha Hashama'im*—was immense. R. Eliezer said that at Sinai 600,000 descended, according to the number of the 600,000 Israelites; and in *Bab. Berachôth* (32b), we find the following story: According to R. Kish Lakish. Isai. xlix. 14 is to be understood as follows. The Church of Israel complains to God: "Lord of the world, even when a man takes a second wife he thinks of the first; but Thou hast utterly forgotten me." But God answered, "Daughter, I have 12 *mazalôth* (signs of the zodiac), and to each *massal* 30 *chêl* (commanders), and to each *chêl* 30 *legions* (generals), and to each general 30 *rabatôn* (officers), and to each *rabatôn* 30 *karton* (captains), and to each *kartôn* 30 *kistra* (camps), and to each *kistron* I have assigned 3,650,000,000 stars. All these have I created for thy sake, and yet thou sayest I have forgotten thee."

'These angels were all divided into ranks and classes, 'Thrones, dominions, virtues, principedoms, powers,' to which there seems to be an allusion in Eph. i. 21.'

*Pressensé* says: 'The form taken by the doctrine of good and evil angels in Jewish theology, from the time of the exile, is well known. It connected itself with some of the oldest portions of Holy Scripture, as, for example, the account of the fall in Genesis; it was doubtless a branch of the tree of Hebraic revelations, but its growth had become diseased under foreign influences. The Book of Enoch furnishes abundant evidence of this. The reader is lost among minute classifications, overlaid with absurd inventions. Every element, every part of the earth, every nation, has its guardian angel. The Book of Tobit gives such a guardian angel to each pious Israelite.'

From an article in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, we gather that 'the angels are revealed to us as beings, such as man might be and will be when the power of sin and death is removed, partaking in their measure of the attributes of God, Truth, Purity, and Love, because always beholding His face, and therefore being "made like Him." Their office towards man is fully described to us. They are represented as being, in the widest sense, agents of God's Providence, natural and supernatural, to the body and to the soul. It is evident that angelic agency, like that of man, does not exclude the action of secondary, or (what are called) "natural" causes, or interfere with the directness and universality of the providence of God.'

The point that is impressed on us by this study is, that God gives immediate counsel and help to His struggling and suffering servants : and if we find it aids us in realizing this grace and strengthening, as indeed from Him, we may be permitted to *personify* the agencies which God is pleased to use, and call them *angels*.

## Miracles of Power over Death.

JOHN xi. 43, 44 : ' And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes : and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.'

**Question.**—*What is revealed to us concerning the mission of Christ by the instances recorded of His power over death ?*

**Answer.**—The mastery of death is the highest manifestation of the Divine power that was in Christ, but no case of restoration of a 'passed' spirit to a renewal of bodily relations can have been a sufficient end in itself to account for the working of such miracles. If it had been, our Lord would surely have restored many more from the dead. But, while we have intimations that He healed many more sick and disabled persons than the Evangelists give any detailed accounts of, there is no hint that our Lord raised from the dead any persons beside the little maid, the widow's son, and Lazarus. These miracles could only have been wrought for the sake of the moral truths illustrated in them, and the moral impression produced by them. It is necessary, therefore, that we should study them with much care in the light of previous revelations, as well as of prevailing sentiments.

We know that natural death, or the mere parting of body and spirit, is not the penalty on man's sin ; for death was a natural condition, for creatures on this earth, before Adam was formed, and was a condition for him, so far as he was one of the creatures.

But death, as we understand it, and as a moral and spiritual book, like our Bible, speaks of it, is not the mere parting of the immaterial from the material ; it is death with conscience of sin, with fear, and sense of coming penalty. It is death *with the sting of sin in it*. It is a small thing for a *man* to die ; it is an awful thing for a *sinner* to die : and we must distinctly apprehend that death, as we know it, is the last penalty of sin. Sin brings on disabilities, diseases, distresses, but the climax of its work is hopeless *death* ; ‘ sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.’

Then He who proposes to redeem the human race from sin must show Himself to be Master of all its consequences. He must make us feel that no evil resulting from sin is beyond His reach, and certainly it must be proved beyond all doubt that he can effectively deal with man’s last enemy. He must illustrate in the entire sphere of outward physical consequences the supremacy of His moral power as a Redeemer. We must not be left with the possibility of saying : ‘ This one thing the Redeemer from sin could not do.’

And yet it was equally important that the cases of mastery over death should be few ; only sufficient to provide adequate proof and illustration. Conquering death was the *final* result, not the immediate form of the Redeemer’s work ; and if He had freely dealt with the dead while He was here, men would have been unduly interested in a material redemption, and have been perilously indifferent to its really important moral features.

Prophets, who foreshadowed the work of the Redeemer, had but strictly limited power in the restoring of life. Elijah and Elisha brought back to life a child, but their exertions in so doing suggest that, in their cases, the Divine blessing rested on the use of appropriate natural means, as it still may in cases of drowning, or lowered vitality. It is not correct to compare our Lord’s raisings from the dead with those of the earlier prophets. It is proper to see in those earlier instances only hints and foreshadowings of what was actually realized in Christ, who, because He had life in Himself, and could give eternal life to dead souls, might illustrate His work by restoring the life of those who were, in an earthly sense, dead.

It is striking to observe the ascending scale in which our Lord’s three raisings are presented. Jairus’ little maid was only just dead. The widow’s son had been dead an hour or two, and was being carried out for burial. Lazarus had been a day or two in the grave. (The ‘ four days ’ is to be reckoned in the usual Eastern fashion. The day of burial and the day of resurrection are included, though only small parts of those days properly belong.)

Christ showed His power over death, in a few cases, in order to teach and enforce His claims and His power as 'the Resurrection and the Life' for dead souls, dead in trespasses and sins, dead in alienation from God. He showed this power in only a few cases, lest the minds of the disciples should be occupied with the wonder of His material, rather than the wonder of His moral work.

This suggestion may be otherwise presented, and in the presentation supported and further illustrated by quotations from honoured writers.

*Trench* says: 'These miracles of raising from the dead, whereof we have now been considering the first (the raising of the daughter of Jairus), have always been regarded as the mightiest outcomings of the power of Christ; and with justice. They are those, also, at which unbelief is readiest to stumble, standing as they do in a yet more striking contrast than any of the other, to all that experience has known. The line between sickness and health is not definitely fixed; the two conditions melt one into the other, and the transition from this to that is frequent. In like manner storms alternate with calms; the fiercest tumult of the elements allays itself at last; and Christ's word which stilled the tempest, did but anticipate, and effect in a moment, what the very course of nature must have effected in the end. Even the transmutation from water to wine, and the multiplication of the bread, are not without their analogies, however remote; and thus, too, is it with most of the other miracles. But between being and the negation of being, the opposition is not relative, but absolute; between death and life a gulf lies, which nothing that nature lends can help us even in imagination to bridge over. By considerations such as these is sufficiently explained the fact, that miracles of this class are signs more spoken against than any other among the mighty works which the Lord accomplished.'

*Edersheim* has some valuable remarks on the modern tendency to explain away these raisings from the dead, and especially the earliest one of the series: 'As regards the restoration to life of Jairus' daughter, there is a difference in the negative school (between *Keim* and *Strauss*). One party insists that the maiden only seemed, but was not really dead, a view open also to this objection, that it is manifestly impossible by such devices to account for the raising of the young man at Nain, or that of Lazarus. On the other hand, *Strauss* treats the whole as a myth. It is well, that in this case he should have descended to argument in support of his view, appealing to the expectancy created by like miracles of Elijah and Elisha, and to the general belief at the time, that the Messiah would raise the

dead. For, the admitted differences between the recorded circumstances of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha and those of Christ are so great, that another negative critic (*Keim*) finds proof of imitation in their contrasts! But the appeal to Jewish belief at the time tells, if possible, even more strongly against the hypothesis in question (of *Keim* and *Strauss*). It is, to say the least, doubtful whether Jewish theology generally ascribed to the Messiah the raising of the dead. There are isolated statements to that effect, but the majority of opinions is, that God would Himself raise the dead. But even those passages in which this is attributed to the Messiah tell against the assertion of *Strauss*. For the resurrection to which they refer is that of *all the dead* (whether at the end of the present age, or of the world), and not of single individuals. To the latter there is not the faintest allusion in Jewish writings, and it may be safely asserted that such a dogma would have been foreign, even incongruous, to Jewish theology.'

*Pressensé* says: 'The miracles of Jesus proceeded always from a supernatural power, even on the rare occasions when He made use of some outward medium for their accomplishment. No one will maintain that when He anointed the eyes of the blind man with a little moistened clay, and sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam, or when He laid His hands on the sick, these acts were in themselves enough to produce effects so marvellous. The primary design of miraculous cures was to awaken the desire after moral healing. Physical evil, without being in each individual case correlative to particular guilt, as Jesus affirms, in opposition to the prejudices of His disciples, is none the less the consequence of moral evil. It would not exist but for sin; it is its bitter fruit and punishment. Sickness, which is the precursor of death, re-echoes the sentence of condemnation under which the race of Adam lies. By His healing power, Jesus showed that He was come to triumph over evil in all its forms; if He assailed it first in its visible consequences, it was to prepare those whom He relieved for a greater deliverance; thus He never failed to remind the sufferers who sought His aid, that bodily evil was as nothing compared with that of the soul, and at once to offer them pardon. "Go and sin no more" was the conclusion of all His miracles.'

*Neander* makes some striking and original remarks on this class of miracles: 'The position to be assigned to the miracle of the "raising of the dead" will depend upon the view which we take of the real condition of those said to be raised. Some suppose that they were not absolutely dead in the physiological sense, but that there was an

intermission of the powers of life, presenting symptoms resembling death; and those who adopt this view of the case consider the miracle to differ only in *degree* from that of healing the sick. But if the accounts are taken literally, and we suppose a *real* death, the miracle was *specifically* different from that of healing, and, in fact, constituted the very culminating point of supernatural agency. Yet, even to awaken the dormant powers of life, and kindle up again the expiring flame, would certainly have been a *miracle*, demanding for its accomplishment a Divine power in Christ. A precise account of the symptoms, and a knowledge of physiology, would be necessary to give us the elements for a decision of this question, in the absence of any testimony from Christ's own mouth to decide it. In regard to Christ's own words, it is a fair question whether He meant to distinguish closely between apparent and real death, or whether He made use of the word "death" only in accordance with the popular usage. If it be pre-supposed that the dead were restored to earthly life after having entered into another form of existence—into connection with another world—the idea of resurrection would be dismal; but we have no right to form such a presupposition in our blank ignorance of the laws under which the new form of consciousness develops itself in the soul after separation from the body.'

*George Macdonald* says: 'Without the raising of the dead, without the rising of the Saviour Himself, Christianity would not have given us what it could of *hope* for the future. Hope is not faith, but neither is faith sight; and if we have hope we are not miserable men. But Christianity must not, could not, interfere with the discipline needful for its own fulfilment, could not depose the school-master that leads to Christ. One main doubt and terror which drives men towards the revelation in Jesus is this strange thing Death. . . . What better sign of immortality than the raising of the dead could God give? He cannot, however, be always raising the dead before our eyes; for then the holiness of death's ends would be a failure. We need death; only it shall be undone once and again for a time, that we may know it *is not* what it seems to us. In this, as in all His miracles, our Lord *shows* in one instance what His Father is ever doing without showing it.'

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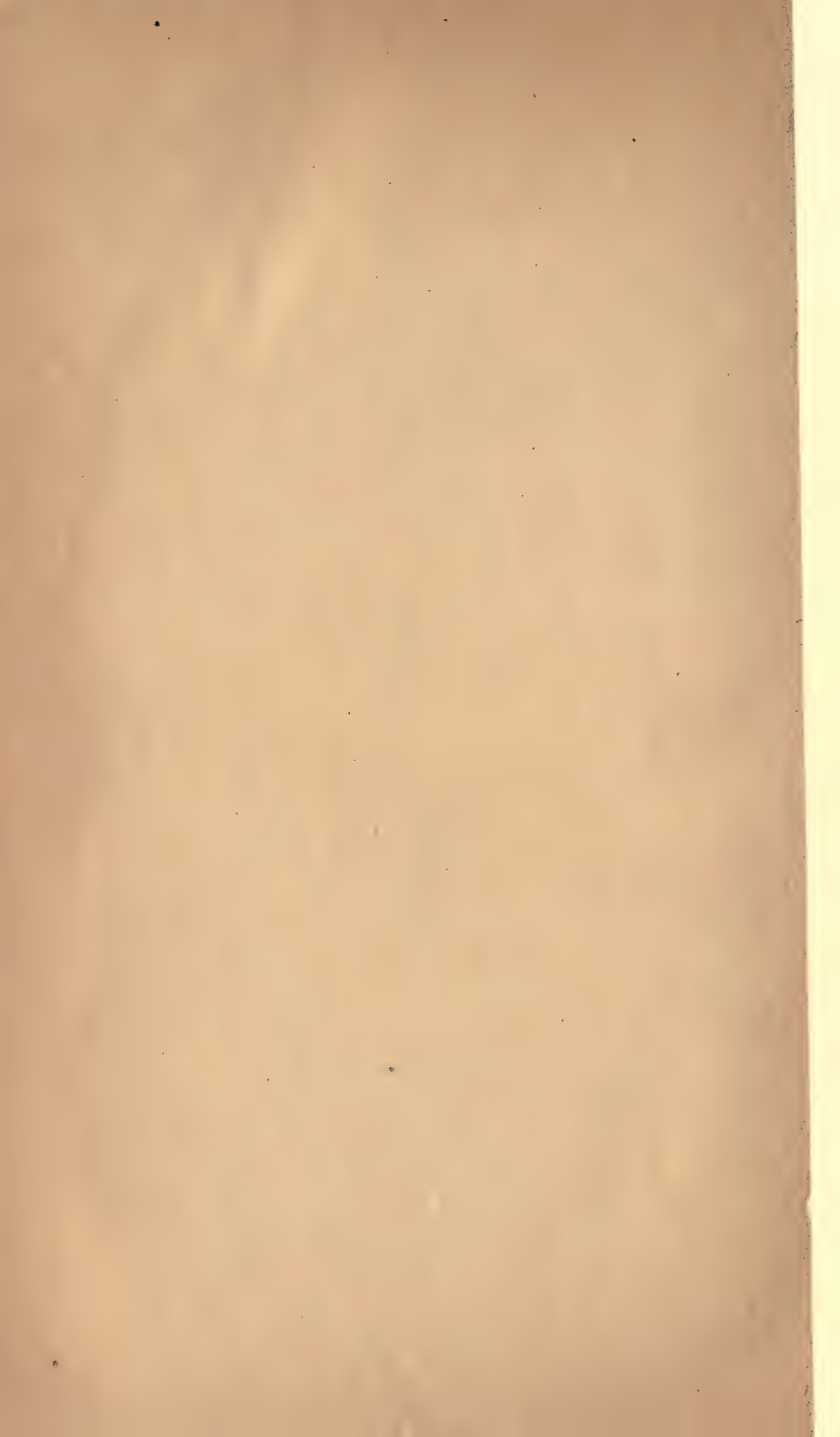
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